Taking Action for Animal Conference 2008

Activist Learn to Take Action through Politics and Public Policy

July 18-20, 2008
The focus of the 2008 Taking Action for Animals (TAFA) conference held this year was on "effective methods of animal activism through public policy and legislation." With 86 state laws helping animals approved around the U.S. in 2007, and Congress having recently enacted a new federal animal fighting law, an optimistic attitude toward new legislation presided over the conference. The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), led by executive vice president Michael Markarian, informed attendees of three bills they are focusing on for 2008: H.R. 891, the Dog and Cat Fur Prohibition Enforcement Act; H.R. 503, the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act; and H.R. 661, the Downed Animal and Food Safety Protection Act.

Over 50 tables were set up by representatives and sponsors of the event from animal activists all over the U.S., including the American Anti-Vivisection Society, the World Society for the Protection of Animals (WSPA), the United Animal Nations, and Animal Welfare Trust.

The welfare of animals in agriculture proved to be the dominant and most highly-referenced topic throughout the 2008 TAFA conference.

**Building an Online Community**

Joe Trippi of Trippi & Associates spoke of the goal for a nationwide effort for an informed global community of activists in the session “Building an Online Community.” Trippi said patience and appearance were the keys to success online and he encouraged activists to try “Meetup.com” to organize protest groups and raise awareness on local levels. Trippi spoke of trying to get cameras into slaughterhouses and other “abusive institutions,” and then attempting to make the offensive footage available to the global community through the internet. He said “millions will be shocked, and they will take action…this is the pioneer stage of this type of activism.”

**Taking Animal Issues to the Mainstream Media**

Karen Dawn, author and founder of DawnWatch, spoke in a session called “Taking Animal Issues to the Mainstream Media.” Dawn said activists’ best bet for success with the media was to “personally befriend the journalists who take an interest in
Rory Freedman, vegan author of Skinny Bitch, pledged $10,000 towards ending farm animal slaughter and abuse, and asked the conference audience to match this amount through donations. No word as to whether she was successful. She gave graphic descriptions of abuse in the livestock industry in an attempt to convert people to veganism, including accounts of conscious cows being dismembered and male chicks being disposed of by making them into fertilizer.

Building an Effective Campaign
Caryn Ginsberg, “strategic idealist” at Priority Ventures, in her “Building an Effective Campaign” workshop, outlined a five-point campaign 2008 strategy with the senior VP of campaigns for HSUS, Heidi Prescott. The two encouraged adopting a consistent message for activist campaigns, embracing repetition and sequencing, and “laying groundwork prior to escalation, without demonizing people.”

Animal Sanctuaries: Standards and Accreditation
Liz Ross, a federal policy advisor for Animal Welfare Institute (AWI), hosted a workshop on “Animal Sanctuaries: Standards and Accreditation.” She said “2008 will be geared at exotics. We are seeking to codify and enforce standards of the Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries.” Horses will also be a big focus for next year, as they are treated as commercial livestock in many states, according to Ross.

From Chimps to Dissection: Protecting Animals in Research
Probably of most interest the session entitled “From Chimps to Dissection: Protecting Animals in Research,” was led by New England Anti-Vivisection Society (NEAVS) president Theo Capaldo, who stated that “ethics is no longer good enough to help activists - we have to argue science, a hugely established discipline.” She spoke of their desire to “extend ethical and legal protection to all great apes, eliminate the use of
animals through non-animal methods, and compel university students to get the first non-human species out of science.” Katie Conlee, HSUS director of program management, animal research issues, encouraged activists to “utilize scientific support and always, always argue the costs...economic savings are on our side.” With the current failure of the HIV testing, HSUS is hoping to completely end all research on chimps, seeing as “chimp research has not contributed to any medical advances as of yet...and the U.S. is the only large scale user of chimps for research.”

H.R. 5852, The Great Ape Protection Act, introduced earlier this year, would phase chimps out of research over the course of three years. Conlee believes the bill will meet with success, asking activists to approach legislators on Monday’s lobby day, noting the high number of scientists who have signed the bill. One activist woman asked Conlee what would compel a congressman the most: Conlee replied that “Economics come first - it’s always about money.” Laura Ducceschi, education director at the American Anti-Vivisection Society (AAVS), also spoke in the session. She informed activists that social marketing for animals in this area is focusing on a “student choice strategy” for 2008. The methodology is centered on ethnographic research, with the local goal of advancing student choices at local schools and universities. Ducceschi suggested effective methods of approaching the leaders of universities and peaceably outlining alternatives to dissection and other “abusive” practices in the classroom setting.

**Advocating for Animals**

The first speaker for the session “Advocating for Animals” was Tracy Silverman, the general counsel for the Animal Welfare Institute (AWI). For her presentation, Silverman discussed in general terms how a bill becomes a law. Very little of the discussion was specifically about animal rights issues, although Silverman did admit to intentionally trying to draft legislation so it would not end up in the Agriculture Committee. She stated they were “never a friendly Committee for us.”

The next speaker, Lauren Silverman, the federal legislative specialist for the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), discussed what HSUS sees as their top priority legislation: The Downed Animal Enforcement Act of 2008 S. 2770; American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act H.R. 503 & S. 311; “Baby’s Bill” on Puppy Mill
eradication which has yet to be introduced, and the Dog and Cat Fur Prohibition Enforcement Act H.R. 891. Silverman also mentioned the Great Ape Protection Act H.R. 5852, but the bill was not labeled a priority as it has been deemed “unlikely to pass” before this session is over. Of the most importance to their members will likely be “Baby’s Bill” because it will contain restrictions in regards to companion animal breeding. Silverman said HSUS expected the bill to be introduced sometime this week.

The last speaker, Jean Fлемma, the staff director of the U.S. House Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, and Oceans, gave a brief overview of what to expect when meeting with a member of Congress. She also did not specifically discuss animal rights issues.

**Lawyering for Animals**

The “Lawyering for Animals” session served as an informational sessions for law students to attempt to inspire them to become animal rights lawyers. The session’s first speaker was Joyce Tischler, the founder and general counsel for the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF). Her general message was that there are a lot of opportunities in animal law. She mentioned the 95 schools that currently offer animal law courses and encouraged those in the audience to petition to start an animal law course at their school if one was not currently offered. She also encouraged individuals to not be afraid to start all animal law practices, stating there was “more than enough work to go around.”

The second speaker, Delciana Winders, an associate with Meyer Glitzenstein & Crystal, spoke about working for a firm that specifically handles animal rights issues. She spoke about her current FOIA case against the USDA for withholding records of 23 Animal Welfare Act violations by Huntingdon Life Sciences. She noted that the case is going to trial, which is a very rare occurrence for a FOIA case.

Rebecca Judd, the senior attorney for the Humane Society of the United States, spoke about HSUS’s cases across the nation. She noted that HSUS currently had 40 separate cases, most of which are being handled in part by private firms looking to do pro bono work. The HSUS legal team spends most of their time doing research, and very little time actually litigating.
The final speaker, David Wolfson, partner at Milbank Tweed, and author of Beyond the Law: Agribusiness and the Systemic Abuse of Animals Raised for Food or Food Production, spoke about doing pro bono animal rights work as part of a job in private practice at a larger firm. Specifically, Wolfson does non-litigation work for the Farm Animal Rights Movement (FARM). Wolfson’s presentation was mostly information about how to get pro bono work at a larger firm.

**Legal Advocacy for Non Lawyers**

The Legal Advocacy for Non-Lawyers session provided participants information on how to start a litigation campaign against some organization or person suspected of animal rights abuses. The first speaker, Peter Petersan, deputy director of animal protection litigation for the Humane Society of the United States, informed participants of how to use federal and state FOIA laws to get information about companies that may be guilty of past violations of the Animal Welfare Act or other laws. The next two speakers, Pamela Alexander, animal law program director for the Animal Legal Defense Fund (ALDF), and Nicole Paquette, senior vice president of Born Free USA united with Animal Protection Institute, presented jointly about how to get involved in the regulatory process and how to start litigation against regulations that seem illegal.

The panel was constantly interrupted by questions from the audience about how to use the law to their advantage and when it was time to “sue the bad people”. The panel encouraged individuals to obtain video of animal abuse by standing in a public place and to get involved in situations where abuse is suspected.