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Humane Society Notches String of Big Wins Under Aggressive Leader

Wayne Pacelle has made life better for animals by attacking issues from all sides and spending liberally on ads and fundraising.



LINDA DAVIDSON/THE WASHINGTON POST/GETTY IMAGES

OFFICE MATES: Wayne Pacelle's rescue dog Lily, a beagle mix, goes to work with him every day. His cat Zoe stays home.

By Marc Gunther

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The last decade has been a very good one for animals in the United States. Millions of laying hens are being freed from their cages, and pregnant pigs are being liberated from gestation crates. Fewer dogs and cats are euthanized, and dogfighting and cockfighting have been banned in all 50 states.

TOOLS THE HUMANE SOCIETY USES TO ACHIEVE ITS MISSION

UNDERCOVER INVESTIGATIONS

A Humane Society investigator exposed what the group called “a veritable house of horrors” at New England’s largest egg producers.

POLITICAL DONATIONS

The Humane Society Legislative Fund, the organization’s political-action committee, reported spending \$373,000 during the 2016 election cycle (through October) to support federal candidates. The PAC spent 66 percent on Democrats, 34 percent on Republicans.

PROGRAM-RELATED INVESTMENTS

To promote alternatives to meat, the nonprofit has invested in start-up companies such as Beyond Meat and Miyoko’s Kitchen.

COURT ACTION

The charity’s lawyers have joined in lawsuits affecting horse slaughter, cockfighting, whales, and labels that promise “dolphin-free” tuna.

DIRECT CARE

The charity operates animal-care centers in four states that provide refuge for thousands of domestic and wild animals, including bison, monkeys, and a kangaroo.

INVESTOR EDUCATION

BlackRock, the world’s largest asset manager, hosted a forum with the nonprofit for Wall Street investors on how animal-welfare policies would affect food companies, restaurants, and retailers.

Major airlines now refuse to transport African big-game "trophy" animals, SeaWorld ended its killer-whale breeding program, and the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey circus elephants performed for the last time this year, ending a 145-year-old tradition.

No one has done more for animals during this time than Wayne Pacelle, the hard-charging chief executive of the Humane Society of the United States, the nation’s largest animal-welfare organization.

"This movement is at a tipping point, at an inflection point," Mr. Pacelle says.

"Exploiting animals is a practice under siege. Concern for animals is ascendant."

How has Mr. Pacelle done it?

In part by doing things differently from other nonprofits. Under his leadership, the Humane Society has aggressively pursued political advocacy, mergers, and investments in business, and he has flouted charity-watchdog measures of efficiency by spending generously on overhead.

The organization brought in the money and membership clout it needed, first through a series of mergers in the 2000s and later with aggressive fundraising, including direct-response television ads.

In 2015, the Humane Society generated \$187 million in private donations, more than twice the \$71.3 million it collected in 2004 when Mr. Pacelle became CEO. During that time, the organization climbed from No. 229 to No. 138 on *The Chronicle’s* annual list of the 400 U.S. nonprofits that raise the most from private sources.

This year, the growth has halted, in large part because revenues from bequests to the organization are down, for reasons that

neither Mr. Pacelle nor the group’s fundraisers can explain. Recently, the Humane Society

carried out the first staff reductions in his tenure, leaving it with about 600 people, roughly twice as many as when he took charge.

Still, the charity hasn't lost momentum. Mr. Pacelle has deployed an unusually varied set of tactics. "We throw the kitchen sink at animal cruelty," he says.

The Humane Society lobbies Congress, federal agencies, and state and local governments. Its political-action committee, the Humane Society Legislative Fund, supports candidates, including Hillary Clinton over Donald Trump this fall, and has won dozens of statewide initiatives and referenda. Since 2005, its lawyers have initiated more than 160 legal actions and won millions of dollars in judgments, settlements, and lawyers' fees. Its investigators go undercover to expose inhumane conditions in puppy mills and on factory farms, even as other staff members collaborate with companies in the food, drug, and entertainment industries.

The Humane Society has also invested in start-up companies that sell vegetarian foods, including Beyond Meat, which makes veggie burgers; Veggie Grill, a small chain of meat-free restaurants; and Miyoko's Kitchen, which makes vegan cheese. It also supports Hampton Creek, which makes vegan mayo and cookie dough.

"Our fingerprints are on a lot of growing companies out there," says Chris Kerr, an entrepreneur in residence at the Humane Society from 2007 to 2014.

Business Ties

The Humane Society's advocacy is controversial: Mr. Pacelle's critics include the meat industry as well as animal-rights activists who say the organization is too cozy with business. But few doubt its clout. The group's latest triumph came in November, when Mr. Pacelle led a coalition of animal-welfare groups that won a landmark ballot victory for farm animals in Massachusetts: Voters approved, by an overwhelming 78 percent to 23 percent margin, a measure to ban the sale of eggs, pork, and veal from tightly confined chickens, pigs, and calves by 2022.

CORPORATE COLLABORATION

Working with the Humane Society, Aramark became the first major food-service company to put into place more humane conditions for the treatment of broiler chickens.

BALLOT MEASURES

The charity and its PAC won electoral victories this year in Massachusetts, Oregon, and Oklahoma, where voters rejected a “right to farm” measure that would have prohibited future restrictions on agriculture.

Coming, as it did, after the group extracted animal-welfare commitments from Walmart, McDonald’s, and major supermarket chains, the vote is the latest sign that intensive confinement of farm animals is coming to an end.

While the Humane Society’s campaigns on farm animals generate more attention than anything else the organization does, its concerns are broad. They include combating animal cruelty, animal fighting, hunting, trapping, and the use of fur as well as focusing on pet overpopulation, equine protection, wildlife management, protection of endangered species, and the use of animals in research.

"I think of my job at the Humane Society as playing 50 games of chess, at once," Mr. Pacelle says.

Mr. Pacelle, who is 51, grew up in New Haven, Conn., where his father, an Italian-American, coached high-school football and his mother, a Greek-American, liked to cook for the big, extended family. He played competitive tennis in high school and college and remains an avid athlete.

As an undergraduate at Yale, he became a vegan, formed an animal-rights organization on campus, and got arrested for interfering with a deer hunt in a Yale-owned forest. He chided his mother for serving turkey at Thanksgiving. "I was insufferable," he recalls. "Now I'm much

PETS IN THE OFFICE

At the Humane Society of the United States, every day is take-your-pet-to-work day.

The nonprofit moved to new offices in downtown Washington this year, but only after the landlord agreed to what *The Washington Post* dubbed “a leash-friendly lease.” The building owner provided a separate entrance and elevator for four-legged creatures and a turf-covered parking place where dogs can relieve themselves.

EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Wayne Pacelle, the Humane Society’s chief executive, calls pets “a necessary ingredient in our emotional well-being.”

About 100 to 150 of the nonprofit’s workers bring pets to its offices in Washington and Gaithersburg, Md. Among those pets is Mr. Pacelle’s dog, Lily, a rescue animal and beagle mix.

“Lily goes with me to work every day,” Mr. Pacelle says, “and I take her on walks and hikes frequently, although she slows me down because she’s a beagle and has to sniff a great deal of terrain to fulfill her own needs.”

Mr. Pacelle also owns a cat, Zoe, who stays home.

more tolerant. I’m just as committed, but I’m more understanding of the complexities of the world.”

Mr. Pacelle went to work after graduation for the Fund for Animals, a nonprofit group started by the late author Cleveland Amory, becoming its executive director before joining the Humane Society in 1994 as its chief lobbyist and spokesman. He maintains close ties with Congress, cultivating allies on both sides of the aisle, including Cory Booker, the vegan Democratic senator from New Jersey, and David Vitter, a conservative Louisiana Republican.

Building a Social Movement

When he became CEO of the Humane Society in 2004, Mr. Pacelle approached Michael Markarian, then president of the Fund for Animals, about a merger. Nonprofit mergers are uncommon; they require executives and boards to give up power. But Mr. Pacelle and Mr. Markarian had worked together for years.

Mr. Markarian, who is now the Humane Society’s chief operating officer, says he and his board agreed to the merger because building a social movement requires heft: “To take on the big fights that were facing animals — and the biggest industries, whether it’s agribusiness or the puppy-mill industry or the trophy-hunting industry — we needed the capacity and tools and ability have a larger presence.”

Soon after, Mr. Pacelle arranged a merger of the Humane Society and the 20-year-old Doris Day Animal League — he sealed that deal by visiting Ms. Day at her home in Carmel, Calif. — and he followed up by bringing the Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights, now known as the Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association, into the fold. The mergers centralized fundraising, generated efficiencies in information technology and human resources, and made growth possible elsewhere. “We started with three lawyers,” Mr. Pacelle says. “We now have 25.”

Farm Animals

Mr. Pacelle's biggest impact at the Humane Society has been on animal agriculture. While the organization had worked on behalf of farm animals since the 1950s, it previously placed greater emphasis on issues that seemed tractable, including companion animals, trophy hunting, and the use of animals in research. Donors wanted to see a return on their investment, and changing the way animals are raised for food seemed like a losing battle. Until Mr. Pacelle took charge, the organization even served meat at fundraising events.

To turbocharge the group's work on farm animals, Mr. Pacelle brought on four young activists: Paul Shapiro and Josh Balk from Compassion Over Killing, which had exposed conditions at chicken farms and slaughterhouses, and Matthew Prescott and Kristie Middleton from People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals.

Mr. Shapiro was reluctant to leave Compassion Over Killing, which he had started as a high-school student, but Mr. Balk persuaded him that they could do more good at the Humane Society.

NOT ALL AGREE

While Mr. Pacelle's industry critics describe him as radical, his position as a pet owner puts him at odds with hard-core advocates of animal rights: People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals frowns on pet ownership. Gary Francione and Anna Charlton, the authors of *Animal Rights: The Abolitionist Approach*, wrote recently in the online magazine *Aeon*, "If the world were more just and fair, there would be no pets at all."

"We were accustomed to being a swift boat, and now we were part of a battleship," Mr. Shapiro says.

'Defining Moment'

Their first major victory came in California in 2008, when voters approved an initiative known as Proposition 2 requiring that breeding pigs, veal calves, and laying hens raised in the state be given enough space to stand up, lie down, turn around freely, and extend their limbs. The Humane Society alone spent \$4 million to support Prop 2, and allies spent \$6 million more; business

interests spent nearly \$9 million against it. Later, California lawmakers extended those standards to all eggs sold in the state.

"Prop 2 was a defining moment," Mr. Pacelle says. "It showed that the American people cared about all animals, including animals used for food. It was an incredible wake-up call."

The Humane Society then targeted food brands and retailers, and in particular McDonald's. (McDonald's and its franchisees buy about 2.1 billion eggs a year.) With Wall Street investor Carl Icahn acting as a middleman, Mr. Pacelle began talking with top executives at McDonald's about five years ago. In September, 2015, the company announced that it would eliminate eggs from caged hens in its supply chain, albeit gradually. Other brands and retailers followed, and when Walmart said last spring that it would transition to a 100 percent cage-free egg supply by

2025, the battle was all but over. Last month's Massachusetts vote will accelerate the move to cage-free and put the force of law behind it.

Mr. Shapiro, who is now the Humane Society's vice president for policy, says: "It went from impossible to inevitable in a decade."

The organization now wants to improve the lives of broiler chickens, which are bred to grow as big and as fast as possible. Mr. Shapiro and others say the animals' lives are miserable. Tom Super, a spokesman for the National Chicken Council, says such claims are "not supported by science, data, or the realities of modern chicken production" and that chickens are healthier than ever. A long fight looms.

Radical or Pragmatic?

Critics accuse the Humane Society of having a radical agenda. Rick Berman, who leads an industry-funded group called the Center for Consumer Freedom, says: "Animal activists have cleverly shrouded their agendas in recent years in language invoking capitalism, progress, and moderate aims. But let's not forget what they want — no meat, cheese, eggs, leather, or other animal products — and they're prepared to use the government to make sure the rest of us don't have a choice in the matter."

A meat-industry executive, who asked not to be named because he works with the Humane Society, says: "They are knowledgeable and sophisticated and passionate and committed, and I like the people at HSUS."

But, noting that Mr. Pacelle and Mr. Shapiro are both vegans, he says the industry is right to see the organization as an existential threat, with a long-term agenda to eliminate or radically reduce the use of animals for meat.

By contrast, animal-rights advocates say the Humane Society is too willing to compromise. They view the organization's pragmatism as a cop-out, saying that the practice of raising animals for food should be abolished, not improved.

"Our goal should be to build a long-term movement for animal rights," says Zach Groff of Direct Action Everywhere. "These reforms don't lead us down that road."

For his part, Mr. Pacelle says: "We do want to reduce the appetite for meat. We can't raise 9 million animals humanely." But he adds that meat-eating has been part of human culture for centuries: "I don't think we are going to unwind it."

Settling the suit “set up a huge programmatic victory for us, the seismic action on elephants by Ringling Bros.,” Mr. Pacelle says.

Instead of overhead, he says, donors should focus on effectiveness.

“The key metric is impact — what is the charity delivering in the way of services or, more importantly, tangible change in the world. There’s no standard way of measuring impact, and this is where it’s a bit of an art form,” he says.

“You can have a fabulous [fundraising] ratio and be a low-impact group because you can’t punch your way out of a paper bag.”