

The Political Animal: Wayne Pacelle: Congress and President Say Cruelty Is Abhorrent, Illegal

It's Their Capacity to Suffer, and Their Value to Us, That Warrants Proscriptions Against Abuse

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EINPresswire.com/ -- By Wayne
Pacelle

It was a fitting juxtaposition.

At the White House this week, President Trump honored Conan, the elite military dog who chased down the world's most wanted terrorist, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, in his fortified Syrian hide-away.

Just hours later, The President signed into law the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture (PACT) Act, which establishes, for the first time, a national anti-cruelty statute. My colleague Marty Irby was on hand in the Oval Office for the signing ceremony.

Animals don't need to exhibit this kind of high-risk heroism to warrant our protective instincts. But the actions of Conan are a vivid reminder that animals give so much to us, even risking their lives for our national security. Dogs and other animals serve in the military, but they also are on the front lines with our law enforcement officers in our communities every day. They assist individuals with physical challenges and they provide love and companionship to tens of millions of us. They are part of our social network, cherished member of our families, and wellsprings of joy for us with their antics, their pleadings, and their affections. There's so much there.

The very least we can do for the whole lot of them is shield them from the aggressions of malicious people. Dogs, cats, rabbits, birds, and so many other animals are sensate. They have lives that matter to them. Their capacity to suffer is all that's needed to warrant our empathy and our action.

It was five years ago that I thought it was overdue for our nation to have a federal anti-cruelty statute to complement state laws against abuse. It was then that I asked Senators Pat Toomey, R-Penn., and Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn. and Reps. Lamar Smith, R-Texas and Ted Deutch, D-Fla., to consider leading this legislative effort. A couple of other lawmakers stood in the way, successfully holding up the measure for two entire Congresses. But these humane-minded lawmakers – and Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Fla, who replaced Smith as a leader after the Texan retired - attracted the support first of dozens and then ultimately hundreds of their colleagues. So many of them had heard from tens of thousands of caring people like you who wrote and called and demanded that the PACT Act be passed. As Senator Toomey told me at one bleak



President Trump shaking hands with Animal Wellness Action's Executive Director Marty Irby at last night's signing ceremony in the Oval Office

moment when a few stonewalling lawmakers had won the day, it would be just a matter of time before the battle turned in our favor.

This week was that week.

The federal measure, building on a 2010 statute that bars the sale of videos showing illegal acts of animal cruelty, would make it a federal crime to torture an animal in cases where acts of intentional cruelty affect interstate or foreign commerce, on federal property, or “in the special maritime and territorial jurisdiction of the United States.” It also makes it a federal crime to engage in sexual exploitation of animals; Hawaii, New Mexico, West Virginia and Wyoming have no laws banning bestiality.

This week President Trump – with encouragement from Lara Trump, his daughter-in-law and animal advocate Blair Brandt -- put a capstone on our nation’s legal framework against animal cruelty. Another stone will be added when our animal fighting law takes full effect in about three weeks. That law, with its implementation delay a year from its 2018 passage, would apply all federal prohibitions against staged animal fighting to every part of the United States, including the territories. There’s no longer ambiguity about its reach and effect because a U.S. District Court in Puerto Rico just affirmed that the law does in fact ban cockfighting in all five U.S. territories, none of which ban cockfighting under their territorial laws.

Criminalizing the most gratuitous forms of abuse is an antecedent to ending more carefully defended forms of cruelty. No nation can hope to confront factory farming, animal testing, trophy hunting, the fur trade, and other severe forms of institutional animal exploitation – with their phalanx of enthusiasts, business owners, and state apologists – without first taking care of the cruelty in our backyards. When that kind of cruelty rightly earns our broad social disapproval, it’s not a major leap to call out cruelty in its other hiding places, including in the realms of sport, agriculture, science, or fashion.

Wayne Pacelle is the founder of Animal Wellness Action, and two-time best-selling author of *The Bond* and *Humane Economy*.

Animal Wellness Action.org is helping animals by promoting legal standards preventing cruelty. You can help animals by [making a donation today](#).

Animal Wellness Action (Action) is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) organization with a mission of helping animals by promoting legal standards forbidding cruelty. We champion causes that alleviate the suffering of companion animals, farm animals, and wildlife. We advocate for policies to stop dogfighting and cockfighting and other forms of malicious cruelty and to confront factory farming and other systemic forms of animal exploitation. To prevent cruelty, we promote enacting good public policies and we work to enforce those policies. To enact good laws, we must elect good lawmakers, and that’s why we remind voters which candidates care about our issues and which ones don’t. We believe helping animals helps us all.

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