

November 25, 2009

Do's and Don'ts of Lobbying

How to be an effective animal advocate

The Humane Society of the United States

DO's

- Do know who represents you at all levels of government. Keep phone numbers and addresses handy. Help others do the same.
- Do identify yourself by name and organization, if any, when contacting your elected officials.
- Do state a clear and concise objective. For example, say that you want to ban canned hunts (specific) -- not just that you want to stop outrageous hunting practices (too broad). Explain the meaning of terms that may be unfamiliar such as "canned," "pound seizure," "class B dealers." Broad statements such as "hunting bears with hounds is inexcusable" may reflect how you feel, but doesn't convey a message as to what action needs to be taken by the official.
- Do explain why this issue is important to you personally. If possible, link the issue to a personal experience or a situation in the elected official's district.
- Do be aware of previous actions the official has taken on behalf of animals. You can be sure the opposition is aware of the assistance he or she gave on our behalf. Check the Humane Society Legislative Fund Scorecard (www.fund.org) to see how your representatives have voted on previous animal issues.
- Do get to know your elected officials. Make an effort to appear at their town meetings and other events and be sure they hear you ask at least one question on animal issues at each event.
- Do mention how important it is for your elected officials to adequately fund animal programs ranging from local animal control, to state enforcement of wildlife protection laws, to enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act and others. Let them know that this is how you want your tax dollars spent.
- Do join, create, or revitalize state federations or other state wide groups to give your cause additional clout. Whenever possible, mention how many individuals your group represents.
- Do get to know and develop a workable relationship with key people having influence over animals. For example, animal control officers, veterinarians, state wildlife board members, prosecuting attorneys, and health department officials have a major impact on animal protection bills. Legislators listen to their views so work with them whenever possible.
- Do join forces with other types of groups who may have the same position as you even if for different reasons -- such as churches, teachers, chambers of commerce, local universities, or specific industries. Whenever appropriate, get school children to support your efforts.
- Do wear many hats -- not just your animal advocate hat. When lobbying legislators, identify yourself as a parent, businessperson, campaign contributor, or fellow church/club/team member.
- Do work with legislative staff; they often have more knowledge of the issues. Staff speak to your representatives (their bosses) regularly and often make recommendations on policy decisions.
- Do get involved in legislative campaigns -- as an individual, not a nonprofit group. Volunteer to work, place a campaign sign in your yard, hand out leaflets, or otherwise help get someone elected.
- Do learn how to work with your local press by developing a relationship with friendly reporters and editors.
- Do respond to action alerts sent by The HSUS and other groups. When these are sent, legislation is usually close to passage or in a precarious position and your action can make a tremendous difference.

DON'Ts

- Don't threaten or antagonize a legislator. If this elected official opposes your issue today, tomorrow you may find common ground on another issue. But if you make an enemy, that person may take extra steps to defeat any bill you support. A legislator who doesn't agree with you on wildlife issues may be great on companion animal issues and vice versa. Don't make enemies. Today's city council member can be tomorrow's governor.
- Don't refer to bills by their numbers alone. Refer to both names and numbers. Legislators and staff deal with hundreds of bills they cannot be expected to always remember your bill. You will need to educate them.
- Don't fail to listen to elected officials comments and questions on an issue. If they ask how a bill will impact jobs, or medical care, or the budget, you know where their concern is focused. Find ways to address those issues.
- Don't ever lie to or mislead a legislator -- especially to someone who is on your side and needs to know the truth about an issue. Trust is essential for a working relationship.
- Don't overwhelm a legislator with too much information or paperwork. They don't have time for it. Provide them with whatever is key to their efforts and be ready to supply any other needed information.
- Don't be inflexible. Sometimes we have to compromise. As long as such a change won't harm any animals, consider the situation carefully. Learn legislative strategies that might save a bill otherwise destined to die such as sunset provisions, grand fathering clauses, and placing provisions into regulation instead of a statute.
- Don't forget to thank someone who was helpful. Whenever possible, let your membership know how very helpful the person has been.
- Don't use terms or abbreviations that may be unfamiliar without explaining their meaning such as WLFA, PIJAC, or even HSUS.