

HSUS STAFF ADDRESS – MARCH 21, 2008
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David O. Wiebers, M.D., then-chair of The HSUS's board of directors, delivered the following address to assembled HSUS staff members in March 2008.

Thank you so much, and good afternoon everyone. It is a pleasure for me to have the opportunity to be out here with all of you, to feel your wonderful energy, and to share a few words with so many of you from our HSUS staff.

I'd like to start out on behalf of the Board, by conveying our deepest gratitude to all of you for the stellar work you are doing on behalf of animals and on behalf of The HSUS. It has been an honor and a privilege for me to serve as the Chair of your Board over the past 8 years. The experience has been enormously fulfilling, has taught me a great deal, and is something I will always treasure.

One thing I can tell you firsthand is that the Board recognizes that the most important resource The HSUS possesses is its staff. You are second to none, we are enormously proud of you, and your work inspires us on an ongoing basis.

I also want to acknowledge that, without question, our organization has been deeply energized over the past few years by the dynamic, dedicated, and inspired leadership of Wayne Pacelle – who is a profoundly gifted CEO and an absolute pleasure to work with. Wayne, thank you for all you do.

Our organization has also been greatly energized by a number of corporate combinations we've experienced in recent years with other major animal protection organizations including the Ark Trust, the Fund for Animals, and the Doris Day Animal League, among others. These combinations have clearly demonstrated to the general public and to our colleagues and supporters that major animal protection organizations can indeed work together, and that our combined forces can be stronger than the sum of our parts for achieving our goals.

Yet another energizing event which occurred over the past few years was the creation of a new 501(c)(4) entity, the Humane Society Legislative Fund, which has allowed the voice of animal protection to be a much stronger one in the political arena – something badly needed and long overdue in our field. This new entity has expanded rapidly, has drawn enormous public support, and has already been a part of numerous important political victories for animals, including many stunning examples in the 2006 elections. Having a large, effective, and growing political (c)(4) entity is a major step forward for this movement and has clearly opened new vistas for all of us interested in these issues.

There is really no question that collectively we are stronger than we've ever been before, we are better positioned strategically than ever before, and we are on a trajectory to allow us to do some extraordinary things in the months and years ahead of us.

Obviously, there is still an enormous amount to do, but it should give all of us profound encouragement to reflect on the great progress that has been made on so many fronts in recent years and on the considerable prospects for even greater successes in the future.

I also want to emphasize to all of you that the work you (and we) are doing here is very important, not only for animals, but also for humanity.

The mission of The HSUS and the animal protection community as a whole, in a nutshell, is to create a more humane world for all animals, including humans. Ironically, when I first became involved with The HSUS 20 years ago, the medical and animal protection communities were at terrible odds with one another. This was particularly ironic since the primary goal of the medical profession is to decrease the amount of unnecessary death and suffering in human beings – and the animal protection community simply wishes to extend this same goal to beings other than humans.

Over the years, however, I can tell you that I've spent a lot of time in both fields and some of the most beautiful, caring, and compassionate individuals you'll ever meet come out of both of them. There is a great deal of similarity in the spirit of giving and caring, and the enormous fulfillment from helping others. Yet, 20 years ago, the two fields often saw each other as bitter enemies.

Arguments were made at the time and continue to be made by many, in this and other areas of animal protection, that we can't have both, we must choose between humans and other animals; it's us vs. them, humans vs. animals. Well, on the contrary, I think all of us in this room would be convinced we can have both. In fact, I would further contend that we must have both in order for us to evolve as a species.

When a human is born, his or her first and foremost concern is with personal comfort and safety. Usually, with appropriate attention and coaching, this concern and priority gradually extends to include one's parents, followed by one's immediate family. From there, as a child grows and learns to grant to others the same feelings and awareness achieved for his or her own self, the circle of compassion widens. This learning process is not automatic, and the extent to which humans are encouraged to see beyond themselves and are taught to recognize the independent value of other beings is a matter of parental and societal influence. This influence can be directed at breaking down barriers of difference, teaching people that behind the externalities of nationality, race, economic class, religion, and ethnicity, there exists in the other a consciousness and a set of yearnings that demand uncompromising respect. The next logical step in this pathway is to extend one's compassion and caring to other species besides humans.

Our society is in the process of awakening to the significance of this step so that it might evolve to the next level. The process will be fueled by the energy of love penetrating the barrier of species and I am convinced that The HSUS has an important role to play.

Many of our adversaries have warned of the impossible nature of the goals of the animal protection community and organizations like The HSUS, and the end of the world as we know it if organizations like ours were ever fully successful.

In order to respond to such assertions and for us to be grounded in our work, I think it makes a lot of sense for all of us to step back for a moment and reflect upon what the world might be like if we really were successful in our goals over the next 20 years.

Allow me to offer an admittedly incomplete, but hopefully somewhat representative list (which was compiled to a great extent as part of an HSUS Board retreat in February 2000), of what such a world might be like for animals – and I want you to try to imagine such a world with these 10 characteristics:

1. All cats and dogs have loving homes with caregivers who understand, appreciate, and are dedicated to life-long companions;
2. Barriers to develop strong bonds with companion animals, which often lead to their relinquishment, are eliminated;
3. Animal shelters are returned to the role of providing temporary havens for lost animals and support for companion animals and their caregivers. They are no longer forced to euthanize healthy animals as a population control measure;
4. Humans practice humane stewardship of wildlife, and humans protect and enhance the environment for the benefit of all animals – including humans;
5. There is no recreational or commercial killing or confinement of wildlife, including marine mammals – no more wearing of fur in fashion, no killing of whales, no trophy hunting;
6. Preparedness plans and response capabilities are in place nationwide and internationally for animals in disasters;
7. No animals are used in cosmetics testing, no pain and distress is experienced by animals in any form of research, and the use of animals in all forms of research is reduced and replaced. No animal dissection exists in schools. Animals and Society courses are taught at most universities;
8. Food choices that affect animals are humane and sustainable and the consumption of animal products is reduced and replaced. Factory farms are phased out;
9. Strong laws are in place to prevent animal cruelty and there is a societal commitment to the *enforcement* of laws and the promotion of programs to prevent violence and cruelty to animals;
10. Global agreements and treaties recognize and promote the value of animal and environmental protection.

As you envision such a world, I ask all of you the question – does it sound like such an eventuality would result in some sort of unworkable society or a scenario leading to some unspeakable end for humankind? To me it sounds more like the sort of place I would *treasure* being a part of.

Some may call all of this wishful thinking – and I certainly don't claim to have a crystal ball or to be able to put some precise time frame on any of this. And without a doubt, the task before us is a formidable one – at times daunting and overwhelming. However, there are a number of factors which make the coming of many of the components of such a world *inevitable*.

I've already alluded to the innate need for us as a species to extend our circle of compassion to nonhuman beings as the next logical step to evolving spiritually. It is important to recognize that all humans have within them the potential to awaken to the significance of this step. I'm also convinced that substantive change will occur because of the power of the underlying motivation for those involved in animal protection. The power of love and compassion for all life, combined with the ability to recognize the deeper identity of other sentient beings, instills within the human spirit an enduring and unfailing energy to protect and care for nonhuman as well as human life. Simple as this may seem, none of us should underestimate the power of this motivation. It is the fuel which will take us where we have to go – against any odds and against any adversity.

Thirdly, and perhaps most revealing is the observation that this is indeed a one way street. For those individuals who have awakened to the virtue and necessity of a “compassion for all life” ethic, there is no turning back. Rather, these individuals continue to evolve toward perfecting this ethic in their own lives and in the world around them.

The evolution of our species will mirror that of its individual members. As with other significant changes in social attitudes throughout history:

- The opposition will be formidable;
- The process will be cumbersome, costly and frustrating;
- The means to achieving change will be varied;
- And the road will be trying and sometimes discouraging;
- But the result will be glorious.

Ultimately, our own inner peace, and the very survival not only of other species on this earth, but also our own, will depend on our ability to foster an atmosphere of compassion for all life.

I thank you for indulging me in this extended greeting today and for all you've done, all you're doing, and all you're going to do on behalf of animals and humanity. You are all cherished souls. These are extraordinary, exciting and unprecedented times for The HSUS and for animal protection, and I am deeply grateful that we can all be part of them together.