

The New Administration Stands Four-Square for Animal Welfare

American advocacy for the prevention of cruelty to animals has been elevated morally and politically by the excellent statements of President Clinton, Vice President Gore and Secretary of the Interior Babbitt.



President Clinton wrote

"I have always loved and respected animals and abhorred any cruelty toward them. Please be assured that a Clinton Administration would be extremely sensitive to these issues and concerns."

Vice President Gore, co-sponsor of Senator Akaka's bill to end the use of steel jaw leghold traps in the 102nd Congress, is concerned about laboratory animals, too. He wrote a constituent:

"I certainly agree that steps should be taken to protect animals from cruel treatment. Public attention continues to grow about the misuse of animals in biomedical research and testing. As you may know, the LD₅₀ test, which requires the death of 50 percent of the animals involved, is increasingly under fire as is the Draize eye irritation test performed on laboratory rabbits. I believe both these tests should be eliminated.

"While I believe some animal testing is essential to biomedical advances, I also believe very strongly that one important way to measure the true maturity and compassion of a society is by observing how that society treats all living things, including animals. As you may know, during my years in Congress, I have consistently worked for the protection of all Earth's natural gifts. My religious faith teaches me that we must be good stewards of the earth, not just hold dominion over it.

"I assure you that I will continue to support measures which reduce the unnecessary use of animal testing and that I will do all I can to increase awareness of better techniques employed by biomedical researchers. I have in the past supported measures to ensure the welfare of the animal population, and you may be assured that I will continue to work for the humane treatment of animals in the future."

His recent book, *Earth in the Balance*, contains many references to protection of animals in the course of his discussion of the environment as a whole. (See *AWI Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 4.)



Secretary of the Interior, Bruce Babbitt, in his address to last year's convention of the Humane Society of the United States, condemned the steel jaw leghold trap:

"There's an initiative to ban steel jaw traps on the ballot in Arizona. Had that initiative

come ten years ago, it would have had a very narrow constituency. But it comes now in the context of broad support from the

entire environmental movement but with a deep understanding that a society which can allow animals to innocently get caught in steel traps and die an agonizing death under the desert sun, attempting to chew their way out of a trap, crying out in a nonresponsive universe, a society that can allow that to happen can't possibly have the spiritual strength to deal with all of the issues of habitat and biodiversity and living thoughtfully and lightly on the land."

He spoke, too, of the 1973 Endangered Species Act, which he said: "... was an extraordinary achievement, probably the most revolutionary environmental law of this entire century, because it explicitly says when a species begins the downward slide toward extinction, the response will be a habitat protection plan which will make it a criminal offense to take either that species or its habitat. It's been a resounding success across the last 20 years. Of course, it's not enough. We ought to be dealing with these issues before a species reaches the emergency room. We ought to be dealing with these issues in a much more aggressive way. It has, nonetheless, been an extraordinary success. It has led to the revival of many, many species at the brink of extinction. One thinks of the bald eagle, the peregrine falcon, the American alligator, the black-footed ferret, many, many others, and the successes are never advertised."

Of the United States' ability to give international protection to animals, he said:

"And that leads us really to the issue of how do we extend our reach around the world? How do we react to the slaughter of elephants in Africa for ivory signature stamps in Japan? The ravaging of the white and black rhino populations for dagger handles for young men in Kuwait and Oman and the Middle East? The near extinction--the looming extinction--of tropical parrots and macaws in South America being captured for buyers in the United States who will pay up to \$30,000 for a hyacinth macaw, and the consequent, absolutely unspeakable abuses. You can stand on docks outside of Manaus and the other towns in the Amazon and see these confiscated crates with blue and yellow macaws, their feet taped, their beaks wired, stacked up like cord wood in boxes, with a fatality rate of 50% by the time they're smuggled into Miami, Florida. And the question comes, what's our responsibility and what can we do together to stop this incredible onslaught of destruction and violence all over the world?"

Turning to the Marine Mammal Protection Act, he said:

"... a young kid named Sam LaBudde, who lived in San Francisco, at the instigation of a group called the Earth Island Institute, went to a store and bought a video camera, went down to Encinitas, hired on to a Panamanian tuna boat posing as a fisherman, went to sea for three months and filmed a lot of pretty gory, awful stuff involving the use of purse seine nets to catch tropical yellow fin tuna. The nets, as they come up, of course, have trapped vast numbers of dolphin which are drowned in the process. They are air-breathing mammals, and some extraordinarily gory scenes of the dolphins, just strangled, just being dumped overboard as the catch comes in. He brought those films back. They played on NBC some months later and created an outcry from the American people. It's just one of those funny things. Sometimes people seem to have an endless capacity to tolerate brutality and suffering of animals, but other times something comes in at exactly the right moment and creates a reaction.

"In the wake of that, the lawyers went to court and forced the Commerce Department, over the objections of the President of the