

Senator John Edwards
Response to the Humane Society Legislative Fund

Throughout history, humans and animals have shared a unique relationship. People look to animals for companionship and people around the world care for their pets with love. Our family includes three dogs – Bella, Rufus and Lilly – because my wife Elizabeth and I believe that taking care of a pet is a great joy that helps teach our children responsibility and compassion for others. As president, I will work to promote animal welfare while preventing animal cruelty.

Cruelty Issues. Americans recognize the important role animals play in our society through laws that protect animals from cruel and inhumane treatment, such as the Animal Welfare Act, Horse Protection Act, and Humane Slaughter Act. These laws should be adequately funded and properly enforced.

I strongly believe that we should work to ensure the wellbeing of wild and domestic animals, and that no animal should be treated cruelly or inhumanely. I support strict enforcement of laws against animal fighting. While in the Senate, I co-sponsored legislation to eliminate a provision in the Animal Welfare Act that allowed the interstate transport of fighting birds to states that permitted such fighting.

Companion Animals. While the vast majority of dog breeders are reputable people who don't breed dogs too young or too frequently, there are some who forego basic animal welfare and good breeding practices in order to turn a profit. I support legislation to address the chronic animal welfare problems associated with puppy mills. Effective legislation would include better enforcement and higher penalties for violators, with a goal of removing the bad actors while not overly burdening reputable breeders.

The recent contamination and recall of imported pet food exposed serious weaknesses in our import inspection system. Fifteen different agencies regulate some part of our food supply, enforcing 35 different laws. I will give one regulatory body clear responsibility for food safety and give the FDA the resources to scale up inspections. I will also enforce mandatory country-of-origin labeling, giving Americans an informed choice and giving other countries an incentive to improve their food safety systems.

Bear Poaching. The rise of international bear poaching operations is also a serious problem. Bear viscera are used in some traditional Asian medicines and cosmetics, and the killing of bears for the collection of these parts has caused a threat to bear populations both in Asia and in North America. I have fought for the protection of bears, co-sponsoring legislation to conserve the global bear population by prohibiting the import, export, and interstate transport of bear viscera. I believe that these and other measures are appropriate to ensure fair treatment and protection of animals.

Exotic Animals. The trade in exotic animals such as monkeys and other primates should be halted for many reasons. Many of these animals are smuggled into the country, resulting in poor transport conditions and high mortality rates, and increasing the chance that they will spread disease to domestic animals since they were not properly screened at the border. Exotic animals are also wrongly used in the practice of “canned hunting.” In the Senate, I supported a bill to prohibit the transportation or possession of exotic animals for those purposes.

Farm Animals. Livestock and farm animals should be treated humanely. I have called for restrictions on the slaughter of the sick or injured animals sometimes called “downers.” I have also called for a national moratorium on the construction or expansion of concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), which keep animals in factory-like conditions and pollute surrounding air and water.

Wildlife Habitat. Preserving habitat is crucial to preserving the population of threatened and endangered species as well as other wildlife. I will protect much-needed resources for our national park, forest and wildlife refuge systems and invest in the improvements the National Park Service deserves approaching its 100th anniversary.