

Delivering the message in D.C.

As many of you know, through sending more than 300 e-mails, personal letters, and signing endorsement sheets concerning the need for legislation to stop puppy mills and the need for a change in our current dog fighting legislation that would call for more stringent penalties for violators, Marie McClure, Les Seidel and I traveled to Washington, D.C., last Friday to participate in a lobbying effort called

"Taking Action for Animals" set up by the Humane Society of the United States.



Generations

Peg DeMarco

Saturday and Sunday were devoted to very heavy topics from stopping the war on wildlife to dog fighting after

the Michael Vick debacle.

Speaking out for farm animals was heart-breaking as well as protecting animals in research and horses being transported across borders. Downed animals legislation was eye-opening although most of us had seen the recent news reports on the barbaric treatment of cows and other animals that just can't walk anymore and are tortured beyond belief. Taking spay/neuter lessons from the Gulf Coast was particularly valuable because Friends for Animals' "words to live by" are that all must get their animals spayed or neutered to control the unwanted dog and cat population.

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These sessions were particularly distressing, touching and often surprising to us on how bad and widespread the problems of animal cruelty truly are today. We left the final session thinking, "Where does one start to make it better for all of God's creatures?"

No better place than the Capitol. On July 21, we were able to meet with North Carolina Senators Burr and Dole's staffing persons assigned to animal rights and Congressman McHenry's staffing person. My assignment was to ask all of them if the Senators/Congressman would consider supporting a new bill called "Baby's Bill," which would require that domestic dog breeders that sell more than 50 animals per year be federally licensed and that commercial breeding facilities be required to exercise animals at minimum 60 minutes per day.

We were able to meet Baby, the small dog who was the inspiration of the bill before lobby day. She was found in a puppy mill, had lost a leg due to osteoporosis from feeding so many litters, and she could not speak because they had removed her vocal cords so they wouldn't have to hear her cry.

You're appalled. So was I. But this is just the tip of an iceberg big enough to sink the Titanic.

So, on lobby day, after my introductions of the bill to the staffing persons, it was time for me to show them what the "the voice of North Carolina," their constituents, had to say on both puppy mills and dog fighting. I'm happy to say that we collected nearly 3,000 signatures in about a week and that each staffing person was given a 5-inch thick black binder filled with copies of your e-mails, endorsement sheets, personal letters, a letter from us as a team here in Morganton, and a letter from Toni Davis, director of Friends for Animals.

That was 3,000 of you in a week — imagine how thick

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that binder would have been if we had had a month or two!

Once I handed over the binder, I was able to talk a little bit about Phantom, the gentle dog that was used as a bait dog to train fighting pit bulls, and, frankly, you could hear a pin drop in the room as I spoke. I brought with me The News Herald's front page article on Phantom's story and his surgery by two amazing veterinarians, Dr. McMahon here in Morganton and Hickory's Dr. Moss.

They say "a picture is worth a thousand words" and as I watched their facial expressions while they read the article and looked at Phantom's pictures, I realized that if this didn't hit home for stronger dog fighting legislation, nothing would.

And so, it rests now with Washington to see if we stirred up these important issues. But we realize that it doesn't stop after we unpack our suitcases and resume working at our individual jobs. We hope to continue to work with our HSUS North Carolina connection and other movers and shakers that we met with during the program. We're already planning a trip to Raleigh to lobby there as well and some other plans are in the works such as setting up an animal cruelty hotline within our county.

Do we need help? Of course we do. Is it hard work? Of course it is. But you can help in your own way by taking the time to send an e-mail or write a letter to our legislative representatives on all levels and voicing your concern as well. You can write on any of these matters or all of them.

Protecting Horses from Slaughter is HR 503/S 311. This bill would end the suffer-

ing endured by more than 100,000 horses each year that are hauled across the country and cruelly slaughtered for exported human consumption.

Downed Animals is HR 661/S 394. Downed animals suffer terribly on their way to slaughter and are at a higher risk of carrying diseases. This bill would end the use in human food of animals too sick or injured to stand or walk on their own and require that they be immediately and humanely euthanized.

Baby's Bill, while not yet numbered because it has to be sponsored first, will hopefully be given numbers soon. If you write, you can use "Baby's Bill — Stop Puppy Mills" in your correspondence for now.

One other bill proposed is the Labeling of Fur Garments that will close the loophole concerning fur garments

selling for under \$150 — HR 891 — where it has been found that sellers are using dog and cat fur and mislabeling or not labeling the garments.

For those on line, check out http://www.hsus.org/legislation_laws/ for more background on the bills.

Les said it best: "Unfortunately, it takes something horrific to catch the attention of everyone," and he's right. Now that these horrific subjects have our attention, let's work together to ensure that we protect all the animals that so desperately need us.

Anyone wishing to get involved is encouraged to contact me in care of The News Herald.

And a special thanks to all of you that rallied and helped when we and the animals we represent needed it the most.

PEG DEMARCO is a local columnist for Gab.