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Dogs and hogs (Puppy Mill Bill Defeat)

Rarely does light shine on the dark side of legislative lobbying quite so brightly. Thanks to a candid N.C. Pork Council lobbyist, The N&O's Leah Friedman was able to report that the organization had helped kill a legislative bill that would regulate "puppy mills" because - and solely because - the bill was backed by the Humane Society of the United States. The Pork Council is "very worried" about that "powerful, very wealthy animal rights organization," the lobbyist said.

The Humane Society can speak for itself, but it's doubtful that in North Carolina its clout or its cash-flow rivals that of the pork industry. Moreover, it's not instantly obvious just what a bill that applies only to certain commercial dog breeders has to do with raising hogs.

However, if your argument amounts to guilt by association, with a heavy dose of "slippery slope" thrown in, it's a short slide from thinking that if North Carolina cleans up the mass-market puppy-breeding business, and if the Humane Society gets some of the credit, then tougher rules on pork production are but a squeal away.

Not very likely - not in a state that, after years of citizens' complaints, still hasn't shaken off the smelly, pollution-prone lagoon and sprayfield system of dealing with industrial-scale hog waste.

But, to grant the Pork Council's point that the Humane Society does indeed dislike how mass-market hog and poultry growers raise their animals for slaughter - complaints center on ultra-close confinement and lack of time outdoors - what's so outlandish about an organization called the Humane Society pushing for more humane conditions? Improving the lot of animals raised for meat on factory farms seems like a good idea, not a bad one, and anyway it's hardly tantamount to saying everyone has to eat tofu three times a day.

To be sure, the pork producers were not alone in convincing legislators to deep-six the puppy mill bill. Even though the bill bowed deeply to trainers of hunting dogs and show dogs - they would not have been covered - the National Rifle Association fired warning shots, and various dog clubs set up a howl. Not surprisingly, legislators backed off.

Next year, they should take a hard look at the worst practices of the unregulated puppy breeding operations, and pass a good bill.

Meantime, here's a thought-exercise for the Pork Council.

As it happens, the Humane Society of the U.S. is urging Congress to try again (after an adverse Supreme Court ruling) with legislation that would ban those hideous "crush videos," for which dogs or other small animals are tortured and killed.

Opposed to that bill too?

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