

## PILP Stipend Recipient 2003 Holly Gibbons - Humane Society of the United States

*The Government Affairs section of The HSUS is a voice for animals in the nation's capital and in state capitals throughout the country. We monitor and push for animal protection legislation, testify before legislators, draft legislation, and provide expert advice to elected officials-in the United States and in other countries. Our UN and Treaties section advises international leaders about treaty obligations that protect animals.*

I spent an amazing summer in DC with The Humane Society of United States (HSUS). Working in the Government Affairs Department helped me to understand the workings of Congress more effectively than a book ever could! The legislative process in the U.S. is truly messy, complicated, and quite fascinating.

Government Affairs is a relatively small branch of the HSUS with eleven people making up its extraordinary team. While everyone was helpful, three people acted as my main mentors; Nancy Perry, Director of Government Affairs and Lewis & Clark alum; Mimi Rogers, federal legislation expert and Harvard graduate; and Julie Janovsky, the state legislative goddess. Each of them took time to teach me about her specialty, and all three quickly befriended me, which I appreciated as the “new kid.”

My tasks included learning the details of proposed federal legislation and educating legislative aides in an attempt to gain support from members of Congress. I also researched federal and state laws to help draft various documents. For example, I made charts of how state laws currently deal with animal issues. The charts were perhaps my favorite task, because they are now being used to draft new statutes that will provide greater protection for animals. It is remarkable knowing that the work I did is directly impacting state laws.

I attended a federal hearing in the House Resources Committee on two proposed legislative acts, *Don't Feed the Bears* and the *Captive Wildlife Safety Act*. I understood before I went to DC that an inordinate amount of “wheelin’ and dealin’” takes place between politicians. However, I was shocked to see the juvenile behavior that was tolerated during a federal hearing! During the bear baiting hearing, Don Young, a Representative from Alaska addressed Rep. Moran, “You don’t know anything about Alaska.... You’re messing with my people, and that’s the wrong thing to do.” Rep. Moran was cool and dignified in his response. “My constituents, through their taxes, provide means to purchase and maintain that federal land.” This response was apparently too challenging to argue against, so instead the Alaskan representative yelled, “I wish I had my native people in here right now! You’d walk out of here with no head on!” Incredibly, this emotional outburst was not reprimanded. Nothing.

The most valuable thing I learned about the legislative process is that individual letters make a significant difference! I heard stories from multiple legislative aides about how

one letter from a constituent was the catalyst for proposing legislation or supporting a bill. Also, email is now as effective as snail mail. An important component of the letter is a request to the Congressperson asking to please respond to you with how he or she plans to vote on your issue. Hold them accountable!

Overall, it was an extraordinary experience and I highly recommend it to any law student.