

Newsletter 41 Animal Rights January 1, 2026

I have been puzzling about which of several current subjects in the news lately and related to Step Forward America I might focus on for this newsletter. Quite frankly, I need a break from the trials and tribulations of Donald Trump, and I think some of my readers might feel the same way. I am particularly sick of the Epstein papers and it seems that it will be months if ever before the truth is pried out of our Justice Department.

Recall that, in my last newsletter addressing the character of our Chief Executive, I quoted Abraham Joshua Heschel , an American rabbi who opposed the Vietnam War, saying “In a free society, all are involved in what some are doing....Some are guilty: all are responsible.”

With that in mind, If you are considering making any resolutions or taking any action in the new year reflecting your responsibilities, as I am, I think we all might accomplish more if, instead of continuing to harangue about the Epstein conspirators or selling out Ukraine to Putin, we take up arms against something more directly affecting all of us, i.e. the destruction or planned destruction, remodeling or renaming of our federal buildings without our consultation---the White House, The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, the Robert C. Weaver Federal Building named for the first Black Cabinet member, the GSA Regional Office Building, the 1919 Liberty Loan Building, and the Wilbur J. Cohen Federal Building full of priceless murals designed to showcase the 1935 Social Security Act. These belong to all of us, not solely to Donald Trump. They are held in trust for all of us, the American people, by the General Services Administration or the National Park Service and funded by us through Congress who must take action. Write your Representative or Senators.

Then again, if you wish to digress entirely from political issues when making resolutions, there are other avenues on the way to the good citizenship that Step Forward America preaches. We talk about compassion being a key trait of good character---compassion for our fellow man as well as for the well being of the planet that we all inhabit. The Trump administration with its treatment of immigrants and its disdain for climate control is setting a particularly bad example for all of us. But here is a third leg to this stool for which we humans are responsible, and that is, in the words of the 19th century Anglican hymn and picked up by Jim Herriot in his writings about husbandry in the Yorkshire dales, “All Creatures Great and Small.”

I am an animal lover evidenced in part by a lifetime breeding Airedale Terriers, so, let’s talk about “all creatures great and small, i.e. animal rights--- for our pets---for farm animals---and for wildlife---from song birds to elephants. If you’re interested, perhaps thinking about your charitable contributions as well as your resolutions for 2026, read on. If not, pick up again with me next month when I’ll have some new ideas on civics education, national service or related issues to discuss.

You may recall, if you have read *Bachelors of Citizenship*, we have a section on anticipating the future. We ask who would have ever considered in the earliest years of our nation that someday some of the most serious challenges to us, to the future of mankind in fact, would be nuclear proliferation or climate change? Since I wrote that, we might also include the consequences of artificial intelligence as an equal or even greater challenge.

I went on to say that we need only open our eyes a little wider when we look around us to come up with some very serious then current potential issues or practices which we tend to overlook, but which, as Nicholas Kristof pointed out in a past *New York Times* article, “our great-grandchildren will find bewilderingly immoral about our own times—and about us.” Mr. Kristof identified as one issue the cruelty to

animals citing factory farming practices, specifically the brutal processes that we use to slaughter poultry, cattle and other domesticated animals, let alone the cruel crowded conditions in which we raise many of them, poultry and calves for example. A generation or two from now, when many, perhaps even most of us, conclude that the human race is merely the highest in a progressive order of animal life, and not distinctly different from a sensory stand-point from others high in the order, elephants and whales for example, will they be horrified by the way previous generations treated others of the animal order.

Focusing on animal rights gives us all an opportunity with a minimum of effort to immediately contribute, albeit in many cases in a very small but satisfying way.

We are making some progress, at least in the way we treat poultry. What can we as individuals do? Visit Better Chicken Commitment on the web and support their committed suppliers that include Burger King, Panera Bread, and Subway among others. The commitments address adequate living space, adequate clean dry litter, comfortable hours of light and dark, and compassionate stunning methods for slaughter.

We can also buy our eggs from farms who advertise their hens as being humanely treated. The majority of egg-laying chickens in the country are battery caged hens living in a space smaller than a sheet of paper. The crowded and confined cages leave no room for the birds to spread their wings, much less fly or stretch.

The small spaces also rob these chickens of privacy and space in which to lay their eggs. The instinct to nest and roost are ingrained in a bird's psyche, and having no space or resources to do either makes these birds' lives miserable.

Don't be fooled by the terms cage-free, free-range or pasture raised unless the term "certified humane" or "humane farm animal care" is included. This is the only way to ensure that the chickens have access

to wholesome and nutritious feed, are raised in an appropriate environment with adequate space and subject to conscientious care and considerate handling, transport, and slaughter

Cage free and free range means just that, no cages, but they can still be excessively crowded in as little as 2 square feet per chicken.

To qualify as a pasture-raised chicken farm, each hen must be allowed 108 square feet of outdoor space plus an indoor barn for cover. This requirement is not part of any USDA regulation, but it is required for the chickens and eggs to be labeled as **certified humane raised and handled**. You will pay a couple of dollars more per dozen eggs, but, if you can afford it, it's a good bargain.

I recently learned a very disturbing lesson regarding farm animals. While traveling through farm land in Addison County Vermont we passed by several very large dairy farms which by the tidy appearance of their barns would seem to have been active with one exception---there wasn't a dairy cow to be seen in the extensive fields. I didn't realize until the friend I was with advised me that the cows on these particular farms no longer have access to pasture. They spend their entire life confined indoors. Conditions, based on my subsequent admittedly minimum research, range from intensely cruel confinement to enough space to move around in but what we would all consider an unnaturally inactive life.

The certified humane label is also used to rate the standards for raising the animals from which we buy our meat and poultry. If you're interested in avoiding ham or veal from excessively confined pigs and calves, you can visit certifiedhumane.org for recommendations.

Now, let's move on to wildlife. If you are not already doing so and you have an outside yard, here's a fun and rewarding way to look after some of the "small creatures." Like many of you, we feed the songbirds, enjoy identifying the habits of the various species in our locale, and frequently learn something new. For example, some time ago, we had a

leucistic songbird at our feeder. Ok, what is leucism---lack of pigment in feathers, in extreme cases similar to an albino in mammals.

When we think about other wildlife, we are all concerned about endangered species both in the US and worldwide. And here, unfortunately, is another area where we don't measure up..

Earth Justice, the nation's leading environmental law organization, describes The Endangered Species Act as "the best tool we have to fight the worsening biodiversity crisis, which puts a million species at risk of extinction. Already, over one-third of plant and animal species in the U.S. are at risk of disappearing. Across 14 presidential administrations, Earth Justice has used this law to protect imperiled species and the ecosystems upon which we all depend." However, the current administration is proposing weakening the ESA by narrowing the protection of critical habitat and other changes that make it easier for industrial logging and drilling. And on December 18, the House of Representatives voted 211-204, largely on party lines, to prematurely strip gray wolves of federal Endangered Species Act protections across the lower 48 states. To keep abreast of the administration's anticipated attempts to continue to weaken the ESA, visit earthjustice.org.

When we look beyond the US for endangered species, most of us immediately think of African and Asian elephants, because of their super intelligence, social habits, size, and distinct appearance. Due primarily to the ivory trade, they continue to face a major threat from poaching—an illegal practice driven by the demand for ivory from their tusks. They are one of the most heavily poached mammals in the world, with a staggering 90% of African elephants being killed by poachers within the last 100 years. Though they are less at risk of poaching than their African counterparts, Asian elephants also face significant threats from poaching. Here there are several interesting opportunities to donate for their protection. The best known is the World Wildlife Fund (WWF). But, if you prefer, you can actually adopt a specific orphaned baby elephant by giving to the Sheldrick Wildlife Trust, your fee going for the elephant's upkeep

until its return to the wild. The Trust will give you details concerning that elephant's orphanage circumstances and regular updates on their orphanage program. If you give to the Reteti Elephant Sanctuary, you can also adopt a specific young elephant and in return receive frequent updates including photos on its progress until released to the wild---what a nice gift for a youngster!

And finally, let's talk about pets. Those heart-rending photos, real not AI generated, that you see in the ASPCA and Humane Society ads depict the horrendous suffering of dogs abandoned or maltreated. These organizations need your donations, and undoubtedly in your area there are other organizations from which you can rescue a dog or to which you can make a donation. A gift to the American Kennel Club Political Action Committee provides support to candidates for federal or state legislative office who support reasonable enforceable laws that protect the health and welfare of dogs and do not restrict the rights of breeders and owners who take their responsibilities seriously. Dogs serve a variety of purposes from hunting, guarding, searching and rescuing to just plain companionship. We read about the current epidemic of loneliness especially with the young, and a dog might at least partially fill this gap for someone you know. And a dog rescued from a shelter can form an especially strong bond. If you want more than just a companion and would be interested in participating in a new challenging activity, purchase a pure bred dog and pursue AKC confirmation, obedience, agility, tracking, dock diving and other events--a super alternative to team sports for those youngsters who, regardless of their parents ambitions, are not interested in or physically capable of participating in team sports.

There are plenty of simple "but what can I do" animal related resolutions or actions from which to choose. I've offered some that follow the recommendations of Roland Fryer who in his yesterday's *Wall Street Journal* opinion piece "A Slightly Better You in the New

Year” said “Make the goal small....behaviors with the highest survival rate are the ones easy enough to complete on your worst days.”

With that I wish you all a very happy 2026.

For comments, further information or requests to unsubscribe, contact me at tedhol@charter.net

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