

PROFILES IN CITIZENSHIP: HOW TO KEEP THE REPUBLIC



Paul Markow Photography

Wayne Pacelle

Wayne Pacelle is the chief executive officer of the Humane Society of the United States, the nation's largest animal rights organization, and has worked tirelessly to expand the group's membership and influence in Washington on behalf of creatures great and small. We spoke with him on March 10, 2005. Here's some of what he had to say.

On the positive side of lobbying:

There's a reason in Washington, D.C., that there are thousands of lobbyists and thousands of interest groups. They're not here for fun; it's not just a big party. They're here because it does make a difference, and participation can have a measurable impact on public policy. I think for me, just being determined and dogged about it, just not relenting, just basically treating this as if it's a full court press all the time. . . . I mean when we're not on defense, we're on the offense.

It's almost a very crusading sort of attitude. I don't like to infuse it with religious sorts of notions, but it's a powerful, ethical construct. And having enough imagination to see that things can be different. That we're not just locked into our present set of social relationships and circumstance, that we can aspire to do things better.

On keeping the republic:

No one's going to hand you a key to change everything, but if you're smart and if you're determined you can make a real difference in the world. I've seen it happen thousands and thousands of times. And anybody who tells me differently just isn't paying attention to what's going on. And don't count on somebody else to do it, you know, don't count on a group like the Humane Society of the United States to do it. When I go around and I talk to people, I say, "Listen, we can help." And our staff of four hundred, we've got great experts and we do a lot of amazing stuff, but you make the difference. It's the collective action of people of conscience that really can have a meaningful impact on society. And again, the history is of people stepping up and calling themselves to action. And leadership and citizenship are such important values in this culture. And if not them, who?