

**On the topic of horse slaughter,** Rep. Nick Rahall II doesn't mince words: "It is immoral and not the American way."

It's the type of strong message that the West Virginia Democrat has communicated on a number of animal issues since becoming head of the House Natural Resources Committee in 2007. As chairman, Rahall can prioritize animal-friendly legislation for action and work with House leaders to schedule floor votes, and he has used this power to the animals' advantage numerous times in the 111th Congress.

In recognition of Rahall's leadership, HSLF and The HSUS have named him the 2009 Humane Legislator of the Year. Rahall received the award during a March reception on Capitol Hill in which 131 additional members of Congress were honored. In this excerpted interview, Rahall spoke with *Humane Activist* about his work on animal issues.

**Over the years, you have authored legislation to protect certain West Virginia rivers and to expand wilderness areas in the state. Why has this been important to you?**

[The bills were] primarily motivated by what I felt was the need to preserve these rivers and surrounding lands in their pristine state for the benefit of present and future generations. They are significant natural resource assets and the last thing I wanted to see were to have A-frames and condos lining the gorge rims.

I am humbled by many things in life. I am humbled by my faith in God. I am humbled by the trust placed in me by the people of southern West Virginia to serve them in Congress. And I am humbled by the sheer magnitude, the power, and the glory of the New River and our wild lands. They are a source of inspiration and a place to renew the soul.

**You're a lead sponsor of H.R. 1018, which would overhaul range management of wild horses and prohibit their slaughter. Do you have a personal connection with this issue?**

I have never witnessed wild horses on the range firsthand, but that does not



mean I cannot be their champion. They are a symbol of America. Just as with the bison in Yellowstone National Park—I do not have to see them firsthand, although I have, to know it is just plain wrong to slaughter [them]. That is repellent to me. Slaughter is not a viable way to manage these herds. There are alternatives.

**You've served on the Natural Resources Committee for 30 years. Is it easier to find support for wildlife protection issues today?**

The political landscape for wildlife has changed tremendously over those years, and changed for the better. Back when I started, there was not really a concerted voice for wildlife issues. That is not to say these issues were ignored. The Magnuson Stevens Act was passed in 1976, for instance. That's the law which seeks to protect marine species.

But when I started out serving on what was then the Interior and Insular Affairs Committee, I do not recall our considering many if any wildlife-specific bills. Parks, public lands, wilderness, wild and scenic rivers, yes, but not wildlife-specific, although those types of measures certainly help wildlife. I think things began to change when groups like



The Humane Society got more politically savvy, both in terms of organizing grassroots support for wildlife issues and in terms of their dealings with the Congress.

**How are you able to use your committee chairmanship to help wildlife?**

I think the record speaks for itself. No other committee in the Congress has taken on the cause of wildlife than the Natural Resources Committee during my reign as chairman. We have shepherded 11 wildlife bills through the committee and the House of Representatives. Obviously, wildlife does not vote. But somebody needs to represent them. I feel that is a moral obligation. To keep faith with God, one must also keep faith with his creatures.

➤ **For more on the awards and a list of honorees, visit [hslf.org](http://hslf.org).**

## Rallying for Chimps

**"As the only remaining** developed nation in the world still using chimpanzees in invasive research, it is time for the United States to join the rest of the world in ending [the practice.]" Those were the words of U.S. Reps. Edolphus Towns, D-N.Y.; David Reichert, R-Wash.; James Langevin, D-R.I.; and Roscoe Bartlett, R-Md., in a recent letter urging House leaders to move forward on the Great Ape Protection Act.

The four lawmakers wrote to U.S. Reps. Henry Waxman, D-Calif., and Frank Pallone Jr., D-N.J., who chair the committee and subcommittee, respectively, where the legislation has been assigned. They noted the availability of people-based models to replace expensive and unreliable research on chimpanzees, and they requested a hearing on the bill "before it is too late for these animals, and before even more taxpayer dollars are squandered with little or no benefit to humans."

➤ **Join animal advocates** around the nation in rallying support for the Great Ape Protection Act during HSLF's next Party Animals fundraiser on May 2. To sign up to host an event or find a party near you, visit [hslf.org/partyanimals](http://hslf.org/partyanimals).

