



THE HUMANE SOCIETY
OF THE UNITED STATES

Criticisms surrounding President-Elect Trump's nomination of Oklahoma Attorney General Scott Pruitt to head the Environmental Protection Agency largely [stem](#) from Pruitt's noted climate change skepticism and his leadership role in opposing the Obama Administration's Clean Power Plan.

But Pruitt also used the attorney general's office to oppose animal protection, waging a baseless crusade against The Humane Society of the United States, working to shield factory farms from state regulation and even challenging other states' animal welfare laws to curry favor with big-ag interests like the Oklahoma Farm Bureau and anti-animal welfare zealot Forrest Lucas.

Campaign Against The Humane Society of the United States

From his elected office as the state's chief law enforcement officer, Pruitt conducted a campaign of harassment against The Humane Society of the United States, reciting baseless and disproven accusations at the behest of Oklahoma farming interests. He continued to make these false allegations even after we met with his office and provided detailed background on the path-breaking, diverse animal protection work of HSUS and its affiliates.

More than a decade ago, The HSUS drove passage of a ballot measure to ban cockfighting in Oklahoma—the 48th state to ban the practice. The Oklahoma Farm Bureau not only [opposed](#) this measure, it worked with state lawmakers to refer an issue to the same ballot to essentially block any future animal welfare ballot initiatives (we defeated that ballot measure, while also passing the anti-cockfighting law). In subsequent years, the Farm Bureau also opposed HSUS campaigns in Oklahoma to crack down on puppy mills, horse slaughter, and the extreme confinement of animals on factory farms.

Scott Pruitt is closely linked with farming interests in Oklahoma. Last year he received the [Distinguished Service Award](#) from the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association, which cited his work to sue EPA over the Clean Water Act and to attack animal protection groups such as The Humane Society of the United States. Just a few days before the election, he was a [keynote speaker](#) at the Oklahoma Farm Bureau convention.

Back in February, 2014, Pruitt gave a speech to the Oklahoma Farm Bureau in which he announced his intention to investigate The HSUS. After his February speech to the group, The Oklahoma Farm Bureau commended Pruitt, [noting](#): “AG Pruitt and Oklahoma Farm Bureau have worked closely and tirelessly over the past few years to make sure our membership has been protected from overregulation, whether from the EPA, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or even private environmental groups such as HSUS.”

In late February, 2014—after Pruitt’s first speech to the Farm Bureau—Pruitt sent The HSUS requests for information on fundraising practices, based on Pruitt’s mistaken [contention](#) that The HSUS fundraised off tornadoes that struck Oklahoma in 2013 and subsequently used those funds out of state. Pruitt also raised concerns that the HSUS did not use enough money to help Oklahoma’s dogs and cats, failing to recognize both HSUS’ contributions in the state and the diversity of HSUS’ animal protection work. The HSUS promptly complied with Pruitt’s requests, and in particular made clear that the organization [never](#) did any fundraising based on the tornadoes.

Yet before his office had even received any of the information that he requested, Pruitt issued a consumer alert against The HSUS on March 12, 2014. The alert repeated the false allegation, proffered by the Farm Bureau and other critics of HSUS, that the organization had misled donors with fundraising pitches relating to the 2013 tornadoes. Again, there was zero basis for this claim, since HSUS didn’t actively conduct fundraising after the tornado devastated Moore.

The consumer alert from Pruitt’s office also stated that it had received donor complaints. But his office would later acknowledge privately to HSUS that it had never received a single complaint from any contributor alleging they were misled by HSUS advertisements or solicitations.

Just hours after Pruitt issued his consumer alert, an industry front group run by Washington, D.C. public-relations operative Rick Berman, whose talking points Pruitt clearly relied upon, [launched](#) a week-long advertising campaign defaming us in the state. That campaign specifically referred to Pruitt’s investigation. Pruitt denied any cooperation with the group, but never explained how they were ready to file their ads within hours of his alert and to mention his consumer alert.

The Oklahoma Solicitation of Charitable Contributions Act [requires](#) that “information obtained pursuant to the powers conferred by this act shall not be made public or disclosed by the Attorney General....” Yet throughout his investigation of The HSUS, Pruitt turned what was supposed to be a confidential process into a public event. He issued overbroad requests for information, including documents pertaining to internal governance.

On January 21, 2015, The HSUS [filed suit](#) in Oklahoma state court to challenge Pruitt’s harassment, asking the court to stop Pruitt from forcing HSUS to produce the remaining privileged and confidential materials.

On February 26, 2015, Judge Patricia G. Parrish, sitting in the Seventh Judicial District of Oklahoma, [ruled in our favor](#) on the merits. She found that Pruitt had no right to 46 of the 48 items that he had demanded from us, ruling “All remaining documents, including those portions indicated above that were not subject to the attorney-client privilege, contain proprietary information, are irrelevant to the issues herein, and should not be produced.”

Noted non-profit blog *The Agitator* [called](#) Pruitt’s crusade a “misuse and abuse of fundraising regulations by an elected official with the goal of intimidating, weakening or discrediting a large and respected nonprofit.”

Right to Farm

It's clear that Pruitt's campaign against HSUS was designed to try to weaken the organization so it could not effectively fight a looming "Right to Farm" referendum readied for the ballot by the Farm Bureau and lawmakers aligned with the organization. Pruitt was a prominent supporter of the "Right to Farm" ballot measure in Oklahoma, which constituted an attempt to restrict the state or other local governments from regulating farms unless they could prove a "compelling state interest" – a high legal standard that could have forced court action in order for the government to pass meaningful animal welfare or environmental regulations. State Question 777 was so broadly written that it might have prevented restrictions on puppy mills, horse slaughter, and even cockfighting – not to mention pollution stemming from factory farming practices.

Pruitt penned an [op-ed in the Tulsa World](#) advocating for passage of the ballot measure, and as opposition to the measure gained momentum, he worked in a very public way to defend the measure by saying it [wouldn't impact water quality](#) in the state.

This blatant attempt to protect large-scale operations – including foreign interests like China-owned Smithfield Foods, which has a large presence in the state – was roundly defeated by Oklahoma voters by a [60-40 margin](#). Donald Trump won all 77 counties in Oklahoma, one of the reddest states in the country, but [37 of those counties](#) sided with animal advocates and family farmers against Pruitt and Big Ag. The three prior governors of Oklahoma – Brad Henry, Frank Keating, and David Walters – all opposed State Question 777, as did almost all of the state's major newspapers.

Interference in Out-of-State Agricultural Practices

Pruitt also filed a lawsuit with Missouri Attorney General Chris Koster and other state attorneys general to try to strike down California's law setting basic animal welfare and food safety standards for the sale of eggs in the state—requiring that the hens have enough space to turn around and stretch their wings.

A federal judge dismissed the case, finding that Koster's lawsuit against California was brought on behalf of special interests, not the people of Missouri. The judge [wrote](#), "The court concludes plaintiffs have not brought this action on behalf of their interest in the physical or economic well-being of their residents in general, but rather on behalf of a discrete group of egg farmers whose businesses will allegedly be impacted by AB 1437. Plaintiffs are therefore only nominal parties without real interests of their own."

The federal appeals court [upheld that dismissal](#) last month.

The Humane Society of the United States is the nation's largest animal protection organization, rated [most effective](#) by our peers. For more than 60 years, we have celebrated the protection of all animals and confronted all forms of cruelty. We are the nation's largest provider of [hands-on services](#) for animals, caring for more than 100,000 animals each year, and we prevent cruelty to millions more through our [advocacy campaigns](#).

The HSUS is approved by the [Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance](#) for all 20 standards for charity accountability, and was named by [Worth Magazine](#) as one of the 10 most fiscally responsible charities.