

AN ENVIRONMENTAL AGENDA FOR THE 1990s

BY THE HON.
BRUCE BABBITT, J.D.

I sensed four or five years ago that I was beginning a journey that would eventually bring me before The Humane Society of the United States. It was a journey the implications of which I didn't fully understand. It began with my acquaintance with Jan Hartke [president of HSUS affiliate EarthKind (USA)] in New Mexico, on the ski slopes of Colorado, and in a variety of other places. In the course of this acquaintance, Jan drew me ever so thoughtfully into the issue of the humane and compassionate treatment of animals.

I grew up in a small western town where these weren't exactly the issues of the day! I grew up in a rural tradition which, for all of its strengths, was uniquely thoughtless in the treatment of animals and the extent to which the human spirit and human compassion is a factor in our relationship with the rest of Creation. I have now begun to understand—I've begun that pilgrimage. It is in that sense that I come here today, to see if I can explain why I think there is a great convergence taking place between the work of The Humane Society of the United States—its traditional function of animal protection, widening and broadening to a larger view of Creation that says that cruelty to animals comes in many forms (in traditional forms and in the thoughtless destruction of habitat, the extinction of species, the presence of man, and mankind's expansion at the expense of Creation)—and the environmental movement. The environmental movement has gradually become aware of your concerns and come to understand that the task of preserving biodiversity is a large and daunting task. Ultimately there isn't a chance of persuading people, civilizations, and countries to take biodiversity seriously unless they first understand, from the depths of the

In December, President-elect Bill Clinton named the Hon.

Bruce Babbitt, J.D., former governor of Arizona, as his secretary of the interior. The HSUS was pleased to welcome Governor Babbitt, most recently president of the League of Conservation Voters, to our national conference, in Boulder, Colorado, in October.

In his keynote address, adapted here, Governor Babbitt discusses the environmental community's new awareness of the goals it shares with The HSUS and others in animal protection.

human spirit, the need to relate to Creation, to be sensitive to the realities of suffering and mistreatment, and to have a larger, holistic, spiritual view of what Creation is about.

The environmental movement has been a good while coming to understand that. I think we now understand that the human spirit has to accept the responsibilities that we as one species have at the apex of Creation, to make space for the rest of Creation to play its assigned role on this planet and to do it in a thoughtful and compassionate and reasonable way.

A nice example of that was an initiative to ban steel-jaw traps in my state of Arizona. [Unfortunately, it was defeated in November.] Ten years ago the initiative would have had a very narrow constituency. But it came in the context of broad support from the entire environmental movement, with a deep understanding that a society that can allow animals to innocently get caught in steel traps and die an agonizing death under the desert sun can't possibly have the spiritual strength to deal with all of the issues of habitat, biodiversity, and living thoughtfully on the land.

I'd like to talk about biodiversity issues. Biodiversity, in my judgment, is really about space, habitat. It's ultimately about whether or not the human species has the self-control and the ability to live lightly on this planet with space for the rest of Creation. It's deeply involved in the shape of our industrial society, population issues, the way we develop land, and ultimately it's going to mean changes in the spirit and life-style of a lot of people.

Right now, today, there are in the United States two pieces of legislation of great importance that relate to the biodiversity issue, and I

think we need to understand them. They're not the ultimate answer, but they're the entering wedges. They are already under fierce assault from the people who would say the role of the human species is not stewardship, it is the untrammelled right to destroy anything, anywhere, at any time. The debate is inevitably going to get very intense. We can't take the gains for granted.

The first statute is the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The Endangered Species Act, passed in 1973, was an extraordinary achievement, probably the most revolutionary environmental law of this century because it explicitly says, when a species begins the downward slide toward extinction, the response will be a habitat-protection plan that will make it a criminal offense to take either that species or its habitat. It's been a resounding success over the last twenty years. Of course, we ought to be dealing with these issues before a species reaches the emergency room and in a much more aggressive way. The ESA has nonetheless been an extraordinary success. It has led to the revival of many species at the brink of extinction. One thinks of the bald eagle, the peregrine falcon, the American alligator, the black-footed ferret, and others (the successes are never advertised).

I've just come from a long and difficult struggle in the state of Nevada over a habitat-conservation plan for the desert tortoise, a species in deep trouble because of pulmonary infections transmitted from domestic tortoise species that have now invaded the entire tortoise habitat of the Great Basin. We have managed to work out a habitat-conservation plan that is beautifully simple. It says to developers in the Las Vegas area as they begin to impinge upon tortoise habitat, You're going to pay a fee into a conservation fund for every lot that is sold or developed in Las Vegas, and that fund will begin to consolidate the back country, the open spaces, and set them into a preservation mode for eternity. The Bureau of Land Management has been required to reduce cattle grazing, which is absolutely incompatible because of competition for forage and the destruction of tortoise nests, among other things. With that one example we've done what we're going to have to do on a broad scale everywhere in the United States. We've said, The imprint of the human species can't just metastasize endlessly across the land; it has to be concentrated thoughtfully, and a lot of space has to be left free of human interference because there are other requisites if you believe in the interrelated and interconnected web of Creation and the beauty of evolutionary diversity.

There are many, many other examples. The

difficulty is that the Bush administration decided to polarize the issue and to take on the Endangered Species Act. They took it on in the Pacific Northwest in a bitter, drawn-out, antagonistic fight, in which the president of the United States himself went to the state of Washington saying,

It's either spotted owls or your jobs. He deliberately attempted to say, There isn't enough room for biodiversity and the human species—and I, the president of the United States, come down on the side of the inherent right of the human species to saw down every last remnant of old-growth forest in the Pacific Northwest.

It was demagogic because there really isn't that conflict. The reason jobs are being lost in the Pacific Northwest is because the timber companies are shutting down the mills so that they can ship round logs to Japan to be processed in mills in Japan. They are moving their timber operations, appropriately, to parts of the American South. But there was a group in the Bush administration who believed that biodiversity and the protection of species is a pantheistic plot that threatens their concept of the human species as having the unmitigated right to destroy anything in its way at whatever price of pain, suffering, cruelty, and extinction.

As fate would have it, the country's one other effective biodiversity law is also up for renewal. It is also going to be the subject of a knock-down, drag-out fight. It is wetlands legislation. It's not commonly understood by most Americans what wetlands are all about. Wetlands are the most biologically diverse and richest habitat on the entire planet. It's not just coastal estuaries but rivers, the swampy land in the Midwest, the potholes that sustain the Pacific flyway of migratory waterfowl. The wetlands law says that the requisites of biodiversity and the need to live in harmony on this planet require that we pass a law restricting the rights, even of private landowners, to continue filling in, draining, bulldozing, eliminating wetland areas. The president of the United States, in 1988, said, There will be, while I am president, no net loss of wetlands; we're going to stop the destruction and extinction of wetlands. But two years ago he stood in front of the American people and said, There won't be any net loss of wetlands, but I've just

LAURA LEE CANNON



Governor Babbitt holds the undivided attention of the audience during his keynote speech at the HSUS national conference.

changed the definition of wetlands. I've eliminated fifty million acres, one half of the entire wetland base of the United States.

We must protect those laws and at the same time start to think even more broadly about how we preserve space on this planet. The problem is a land-use-planning issue, an environmental issue, and a spiritual issue. Such concepts are very strange in our culture, particularly in the western United States, but we have to have vision and the courage to continue expanding the concepts.

We really have two tasks: one—tough enough—is to take care of what we have within our jurisdiction in the United States of America. There's a broader world out there, and we can't turn our backs on that broader world because there really aren't boundaries anymore. We live in a unified world economy, but we also live in a borderless, ecological world. Everything we do affects everybody else. The extinction of a species is a permanent loss for the entire world. It is millions of years of growth and development put out forever. How do we extend our reach around the world? How do we react to the slaughter of elephants in Africa for ivory signature stamps in Japan; the ravaging of the white and black rhino populations for dagger handles for young men in Kuwait, Oman, and the Middle East; the looming extinction of tropical parrots and macaws in South America? These birds are captured for buyers in the United States who will pay up to \$30,000 for a hyacinth macaw. You can stand on docks outside of Manaus and other towns in the Amazon and see confiscated crates with blue-and-yellow macaws, their feet taped, their beaks wired, stacked up like cordwood in boxes. They have a fatality rate of 50 percent by the time they're smuggled into Miami.

What can we do *together* to stop the incredible onslaught of destruction and violence all over the world? To answer that question, I'd like to tell you about a young man named Sam LaBudde and a piece of legislation called the Marine Mammal Protection Act [MMPA]. The Marine Mammal Protection Act was first passed in 1972 under the leadership of Rep. John Dingell and amended several times at the instigation of Rep. Gerry Studds and a few other thoughtful people in Congress. They said, It's up to the Department of Commerce to establish reasonable fishing standards for the tuna industry—and, as a footnote, we are mandating the Department of Commerce to close American markets to the tuna products of any nation that does not comply

with these reasonable fishing standards.

Although that bill was signed by the president, no one enforced it; nothing happened. Then, in the late '80s, a young man named Sam LaBudde, who lived in San Francisco, at the instigation of the Earth Island Institute, bought a video camera and went to Ensenada. He hired onto a Panamanian tuna boat posing as a fisherman, went to sea for three months, and filmed the use of purse-seine nets to catch tropical, yellowfin tuna. The nets as they came up had trapped vast numbers of dolphins, which were drowned in the process (they are air-breathing mammals), and Sam filmed some extraordinarily gory scenes of the drowned dolphins being dumped overboard as the catch was brought in.

He brought those films back; they played on NBC some months later and created an outcry from the American people. Sometimes people seem to have an endless capacity to tolerate brutality and the suffering of animals, but other times something comes at exactly the right moment and gets a reaction. In the wake of that outcry, lawyers went to court and forced the Department of Commerce to enforce the MMPA embargo provision, closing American markets to tuna exports from any nation using purse-seine nets to encircle dolphins and without dolphin-protection provisions comparable to those of the United States. Kicking and screaming, the Bush administration finally locked down the trade embargo. The American people, through legislation and court action, backed up by public understanding, have begun to change the fishing practices of every nation in the world because of the power of our market, our consumers who insist on dolphin-safe tuna. Purse-seine fishing on dolphins is on the way out because few nations are going to be willing to violate these standards if they're denied access to American markets.

We in the United States have the power to stop such destruction by displaying the leadership to say that American markets are not going to be open to people who brazenly and blatantly violate common, accepted standards of conduct.

We're not going to be able to do it in the rest of the world unless we take the moral high ground at home. It's risky to dictate standards to the rest of the world, but I think we have the capacity to do it if we have a policy that's not selective, not species-specific but rather one that says, We're going to live on this planet in harmony with the rest of Creation. We are going to be outraged and indignant at senseless cruelty to animals. In the process of exerting that moral authority, plus [using] the stick of closing our markets, we'll bring the rest of the world along. ■