

## On zoos, real and legislative

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— First it was "increase our energy bills or the polar bears will drown!" Then it was "Raise more state taxes or the lions and tigers will die!"

No one has been able to explain to me how a polar bear drowns. He wakes up on the ice shelf, dives into the water to get breakfast, catches one of the seals that also hang around the ice shelf, and unless miles of ice vanished completely in the short time he was gone, climbs back out.

Maybe on occasion a bear sleeps too long on an ice floe, which floats too far from the shelf or from land. But has anyone seen an autopsy of a dead polar bear that proves it drowned?

Polar bears have survived various Arctic climate changes since they evolved from grizzly bears; what's different now? I know: the presence of human beings. Not the ones who drive cars and heat houses, but the ones who use innocent animals to get their own way on controversial political issues.

Voters aren't concerned about the possible inundation of Miami? No problem: use the animal lovers. If it saves just one polar bear from drowning, we'll give the Government/Environmental and favored Big Business lobbies control over our lives forever.

Hey, think of the baby seals that one bear didn't live to eat then follow the money: Al Gore and friends are making millions from "global warming now climate change, whatever." In the latest issue of Rolling Stone, Matt Taibbi writes that the proposed cap-and-trade bill will create "a groundbreaking new commodities bubble" that will "rig the game" for Goldman Sachs in a "trillion-dollar market".

But sometimes animals are used for much simpler results. It seems that whenever there is a fiscal crisis in Massachusetts, we're told that the Stone and/or Franklin Park Zoo will be closed.

Setting aside the questions of where in the Constitution it says government should fund zoos, and whether wild animals belong in cages, many people who can't afford an African safari enjoy zoos and advocate for public funding.

Despite past threats, the zoos are still there, but now we have another fiscal crisis and apparently a 25 percent increase in the sales tax isn't enough to cover the non-union monkeys. Last week zoo officials were threatening to euthanize animals if the Legislature didn't override Governor

Patrick's zoo funding cuts. Fortunately, the governor put a stop to this manipulative hysteria, promising that other homes would be found for them if private funding isn't.

That may be difficult during the national recession, but other homes have been found for Boston police horses laid off because of city budget cuts. I wish legislators would amend the state prevailing wage law so that money could be saved using flagmen instead of paid police details at construction sites; I'll bet the savings would feed the police horses and even a giraffe or two!

Voters had a chance to repeal the prevailing wage law in 1988, and did not. Even if they suddenly respect voter decisions, legislators could ask voters if they changed their mind about that law, which increases government construction costs and is one reason for our budget deficits.

Legislators don't have to collect signatures, they just take a majority vote in both branches to place an advisory question on the statewide ballot. They could do the same thing about the anti-trapping law, that was passed by initiative petition in 1996. I voted for it, but wouldn't mind seeing it reconsidered in light of new information, i.e., all those coyote-eaten cats that we didn't think about when we were saving beavers.

I'd like to see last year's dog racing issue back on the statewide ballot too, placed there by animal-loving legislators who could suspend the new anti-racing law until voters have a chance to reconsider laying off all Massachusetts greyhounds.

No one was deceived about the anti-trapping law; it's just that no one considered the danger to our pets. But there's a different twist with the greyhound racing shutdown. Dog owners and trainers have recently filed a request for a judicial inquest into voter fraud, citing Grey 2K for deliberately misleading the public with untrue stories about animal abuse.

I found proponents' arguments hard to believe so I went to Wonderland to check out the dogs' living conditions, found them happy and healthy. Unfortunately, the race track unions concentrated their opposition campaign on their own jobs and, as with a potentially inundated Miami, nobody cared.

They should have realized that Question 3 last November was an animal issue, to be won by being on the side of the dogs. They should have shown greyhounds doing what they are born to do, running, racing, playing with their pack, then resting comfortably in large personal cages where they were safe and cared for by attentive owners.

Now these wonderful dogs will be shipped off to racing states that have fewer protections than ours, or will compete for adoption with Massachusetts' abandoned pets and strays.

Legislators may restore funding for the zoo animals, but who will adopt all those extra dogs?

Barbara Anderson writes a weekly column for Viewpoint.

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