

Triggers and Critters: I sometimes offer amendments on bills that come to the House floor from committees other than those on which I serve. Such was the case last week when the Agriculture Appropriations bill came to the floor. Various other people offered amendments to reduce the spending in the bill by 5%, limit or eliminate subsidies, and otherwise save money. As you might suspect, I supported all such money-saving amendments. Unfortunately, most of them lost.

The amendment I offered reduced spending by \$11 million, which is not much in an appropriations bill that proposed to spend \$17.25 billion next year. The amendment would eliminate a program whereby the U.S. Department of Agriculture kills predators (wolves, coyotes and such) that threaten privately-owned livestock. The government kills these animals using methods such as shooting them from aircraft and putting out bait with cyanide capsules that explode in the animal's face when it goes for the bait.

I thought there were a lot of good reasons to support this amendment:

1. It saves \$11 million, all of which will be borrowed.
2. Why is it a taxpayer responsibility to protect privately-owned livestock? Why don't the owners of the livestock pay to protect them?
3. Less than 1% of livestock in the U.S. are killed by predators each year (according to USDA's data). So, this is not a big problem, which may explain why the property owners don't want to pay for it themselves. It may not be worth the effort.
4. The methods used are rather offensive in my view. Shooting from an aircraft has to be very expensive and, I would think, inefficient. The cyanide canisters are inhumane and dangerous. There are all kinds of non-lethal ways to protect calves and such, including pens, fencing, lighting and other things. And, of course, the rancher can always shoot the predator.

But, like most of these expense-cutting amendments, this one lost by a vote of 132-287. The main "supporter" of the bill was the Humane Society of the U.S. The main opposition was the National Rifle Association (NRA). The opposition by the NRA was key in defeating the amendment. But, the bill has nothing to do with gun ownership or gun use or anything like that. So, why did they oppose it? It simply appears that they oppose most things that the Humane Society is for, even if there is no direct impact on gun freedoms.

I don't understand this. I have been a longtime member of both the NRA and the Humane Society. I do not see their missions as being in conflict. I strongly support the Second Amendment to the Constitution and believe that people should have the right to keep and bear arms. This is about freedom, it is about self-defense, and it is about respect for the Constitution. I also love animals. I believe that human beings should treat animals humanely, in part, because they are God's creatures and we have a moral obligation to care for and protect them. I also think that how a society treats animals is closely correlated to how that society will treat its people.

So, what's the conflict here? One can own guns and love animals. I understand that some people like to hunt. I personally don't and could never see myself shooting an animal. But, I respect and uphold the right of others to do so. Unfortunately in DC, sometimes groups or members of Congress will support or oppose something based on who is for or against it, or who is sponsoring it, instead of because of what the bill actually does. That's too bad. And, I won't do it.

I will continue to speak out for and vote to support the Second Amendment. And, I will just as vociferously support laws that protect animals, both wild and domesticated, from abuse at the hands of the dark side of human behavior. I'm a gun-owning animal lover. And, I think that's just fine.