



LAGUNA BEACH, CALIF.

Rise in animal welfare laws? Thank Judie Mancuso.

By Chanté Griffin / Correspondent

It was a civil showdown over animal testing for cosmetics, but animal rights activist Judie Mancuso remembers the firepower bristling in the room. She and three other activists facing 20 deep-pocketed cosmetics industry lobbyists crowded into a state legislator’s office in Sacramento.

“We had like every large corporation in the world against us,” says Ms. Mancuso, founder and president of the California-based animal rights group Social Compassion in Legislation (SCIL). She recites a litany of foes: “the fragrance industry, the personal cosmetics industry, Estée Lauder, Procter & Gamble.”

At issue was the California Cruelty-Free Cosmetics Act of 2018, a bill prohibiting “the sale of any cosmetic newly tested on animals or containing ingredients tested on animals.”

Democratic California state Sen. Cathleen Calgiani had convened the two sides to find middle ground. But at the end of

in hot cars to mandatory microchipping of shelter animals, from mandates of plant-based meal options in prisons and hospitals to banning fur trapping. Many were replicated across the nation.

“There are a lot of power brokers in Sacramento that are key stakeholders that don’t want us to take aggressive action in terms of protecting animals or the environment,” says Ash Kalra, a Democratic California assembly member. “Judie will speak truth to power,” he says, whether it’s the cosmetics

industry, the National Rifle Association, or the United States Cattlemen’s Association.

In the end, that showdown over the California Cruelty-Free Cosmetics Act ended with passage. Ms. Mancuso described her strategy as “war.” SCIL hired 12 lobbyists – a record for the small organization – to combat what Ms. Mancuso describes as a “misinformation campaign.” She created a “myth vs. fact sheet” refuting arguments that the bill would kill jobs, be exorbitantly costly, and be impossible to enforce due to company contracts with international suppliers.

She found industry allies in environmentally conscious companies: “We had Lush Cosmetics testify at our first hearing.” Support from Lush and a tour of John Paul Mitchell Systems’ hair products facilities showed lawmakers that the ingredient

WHY WE WROTE THIS

Public and legal respect for the welfare of animals can be seen in a growing body of animal rights laws. If you think twice about leaving your pet in a car, it’s probably because of this legal advocate.

the meeting, says Ms. Mancuso, her sole contracted lobbyist looked at her and said, “We gotta lobby up. You have to start hiring lobbyists to help you.”

Ms. Mancuso had reached critical mass: The weight brought to bear against this bill indicated the recognition of Ms. Mancuso’s outside success in creating legal foundations for the animal welfare revolution.

In the past 20 years, Ms. Mancuso has helped pass nearly 20 animal protection laws in California – from outlawing animals

RESCUED: Animal welfare advocate Judie Mancuso adopted her two dogs, Petula and Twiggy (right), from a shelter. They joined a neighbor’s puppy mill rescue, Fergie, for a photo shoot.





tracking required by the bill was not impossible or catastrophic to bottom lines.

Instincts of a mama bear and a pit bull

The “parent” of two dogs and four cats adopted from shelters, Ms. Mancuso, say those who know her, possesses the protective instincts of a mama bear mixed with the determination of a pit bull.

The SCIL model favors the gladiatorial arena of political battle over incremental grassroots work. “You can talk to people until you’re blue in the face,” says Ms. Mancuso, but “passing laws is where I’m going to get the greatest bang for my buck.”

Jeff Ebenstein, who partnered with SCIL for years as director of policy and legislation for Los Angeles City Council member Paul Koretz, says: “Some people take the soft-sell

approach” to politics. Ms. Mancuso takes the “Lyndon Johnson approach: You get up close to them and you show them your passion. You don’t withhold it.”

Indeed, while none of five big-hitting opponents asked to comment on Ms. Mancuso’s legislative prowess responded, Bob Alvarez, a former Democratic state legislative aide who has worked with her and her opponents, says she evolved from “a nice lady ... neophyte” to a “real threat.”

Her approach has won support from liberal policymakers to conservative media outlets. In 2007, for example, as SCIL fought for passage of a spay and neuter bill, Ms. Mancuso appeared on Fox News and learned, she says, that the network was “on the side of the animals.”

The spay and neuter bill didn’t pass, but 19 of the 54 SCIL bills have passed – a gargantuan feat, says Jennifer Hauge, legislative affairs manager for the Animal Legal Defense Fund. California “always leads the nation in progressive laws, especially in the area of animal law,” she says, and SCIL’s agenda is the “leading edge” in animal welfare.

For example, SCIL’s cruelty-free cosmetics act has been replicated in six states; the Pet Rescue & Adoption Act – requiring pet shops to identify the public animal control agency, shelter, or rescue group that their animals come from – was the model for laws in four states; and more than 30 states have passed laws similar to the Animals in Unattended Motor Vehicle Act.

Although celebrities like actors Diane Keaton and Pierce Brosnan help draw attention to SCIL’s activity, funding comes mostly from “dialing for dollars,” she says. “I’m calling people, ‘Hey, we’re doing this. Can you donate any amount?’” Individual donations aren’t tax-deductible because SCIL is a political nonprofit, she explains.

“The animals are dying. Can you come?”

Hints of her vocation came early. “When I was a kid, I had dogs and I’d look into their eyes, and I just felt like we were the same,” says Ms. Mancuso, whose personal philosophy on animals evolved with time. She didn’t give up red meat until she was 17, after she met a friend who was a vegetarian. As she met other vegetarians, she was inspired to study food supply chains. “I read ‘Diet for a New America,’ which is all about how animals are treated and the impact to the environment and what it does

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– **Judie Mancuso**, founder of Social Compassion in Legislation

to our health, and I thought, ‘Wow, I’m done [eating meat].’”

In 2003, when the pet shelter from which Ms. Mancuso had adopted a cat was closing due to unsafe conditions, she single-handedly headed an effort to find housing for the 100 animals scheduled to be euthanized. That leadership and networking experience led to a call in the middle of the night from a friend in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina in 2005: “The animals are dying. Can you come?”

In New Orleans, Ms. Mancuso was struck by the comfort that displaced residents felt when reunited with their furry friends: “Someone would come and say, ‘I’m looking for my poodle,’ and then we’d find it, and everybody would cry.”

When many families couldn’t locate pets that had been transported to shelters around the U.S., Ms. Mancuso, who worked in information technology, led the effort to design a computer system that allowed workers in the city to tag and register animals to reunite them with their families. She says the system facilitated “hundreds” of reunions.

From there, Ms. Mancuso’s trajectory was full-throttle advocacy. She quit her IT job and founded SCIL in 2007. In those early days, her political training came via hired lobbyists and “the authors that carried the bills for me,” particularly former Assembly member Lloyd E. Levine. She learned much “just being in the fight,” she says.

This year, SCIL will take on the oil industry. It is co-sponsoring anti-drilling legislation to protect marine life after an oil spill gushed nearly 25,000 gallons of crude oil into the water near Ms. Mancuso’s Laguna Beach community in October, killing marine life and temporarily closing beaches.

Although it often feels like pushing a boulder up a mountain, she says, “if we don’t seize the moment when the moment is in front of us, we’re never gonna get it done.” ■



NANCY VILLERE/COURTESY OF JUDIE MANCUSO