

Verbena, Alabama Cockfighting Family Pleads Guilty to Federal Charges

Federal Judge and Prosecutors to Make Key Sentencing Decisions Now that Brent Easterling and other Family Members Plea Guilty in Major Cockfighting Case Alabama

MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA, UNITED STATES , August 12, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Animal Wellness Action (AWA) and the Animal Wellness Foundation (AWF) urged the federal court considering the United States' criminal case against Brent [Easterling](#), William Easterling, and five other family members based in Verbena, Ala.

to mete out prison time and six-figure fines on the perpetrators. Last year the U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Alabama and prosecutors from the Environment and Natural Resources Division of the U.S. Department of Justice charges the Easterlings with conspiracy to violate

federal anti-animal fighting laws, including operating fighting pits on their properties, possessing thousands of fighting animals, transporting those animals across the globe for fighting, and trafficking in cockfighting implements. (Federal Case 2:21-cr-00455-MHT-SMD).

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Marty Irby, a native Alabamian from Mobile

The United States filed additional papers that included plea agreements from the Easterlings, admitting their involvement in a range of illegal animal fighting activities. Now the federal judge presiding in the case will render a sentence in the proceedings. USDA's Office of Inspector General and Homeland Security Investigations conducted extensive investigations on the Easterlings prior to the

filing of federal charges against them. A sentencing hearing for these three defendants will occur on September 29th, and for the remaining four defendants, including Brent Easterling, on November 8th.

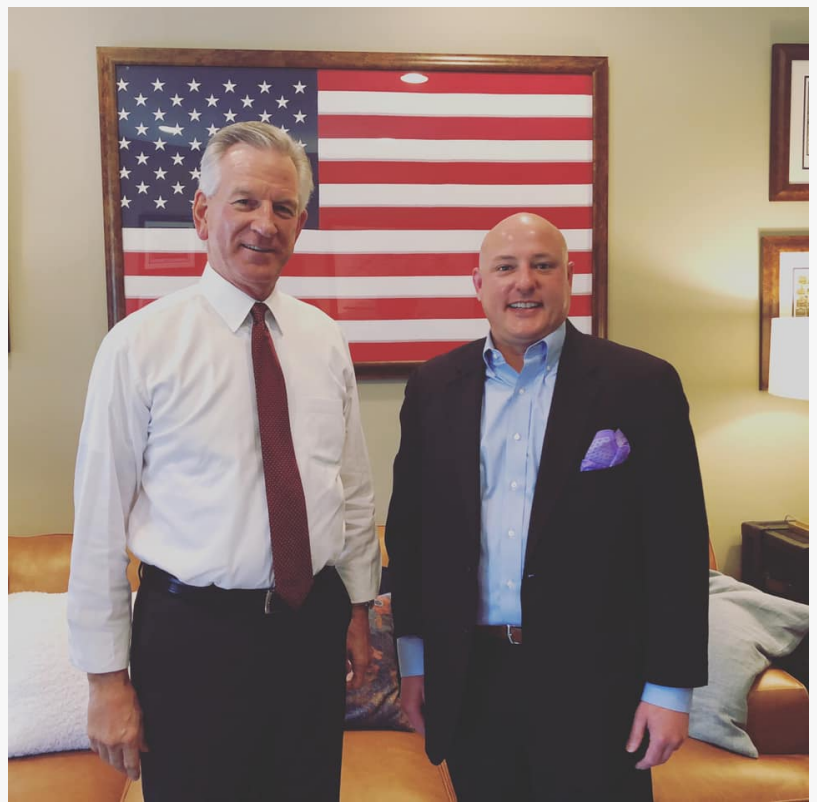


Cockfighting that runs rampant in Alabama

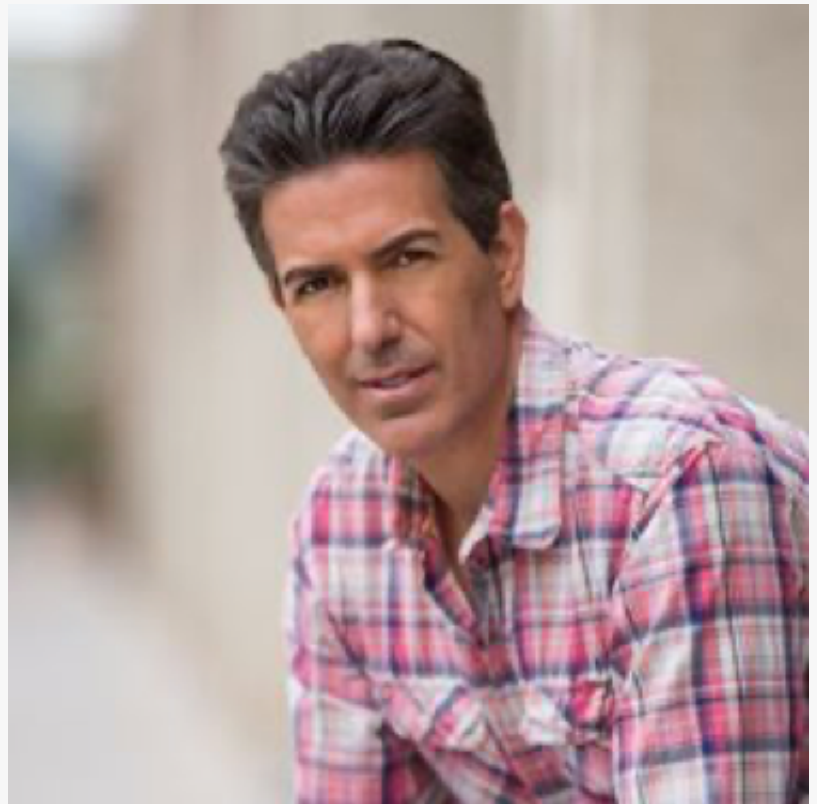
In early June 2020, Animal Wellness Action and AWF released a [detailed report](#) identifying Brent Easterling as a major trafficker in fighting animals and implements. The groups presented extensive evidence to the United States about his involvement and shared a dossier on him with the U.S. Attorney for the Middle District of Alabama and with other federal law enforcement officials. (That report is available to the media on request.) [Animal Wellness Action noted](#) that the Easterlings made hundreds of thousands of dollars, perhaps millions, on the illicit sale of fighting birds. Brent Easterling frequently transported his birds to Mexico, which is a major destination for U.S.-reared fighting animals and participated in fighting derbies all over the world, as a means of then marketing the birds he raised and trained to be cut up in fights.

“It is critical that the federal court impose substantial prison time and fines on the Easterlings for their central role in a complex, demonstrably illegal, multimillion-dollar animal fighting syndicate that stretched across the globe,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action. “The other big cockfighting networks in the U.S. are watching and hoping that they won’t be next if the federal government punishes them in a way that is aligned with the strict penalties provided for in the law.”

“The rule of law matters, including when it applies to animal cruelty,” said Marty Irby, executive director of Animal Wellness Action and a native Alabamian from Mobile. “Given the Yellowhammer State’s anti-cockfighting law

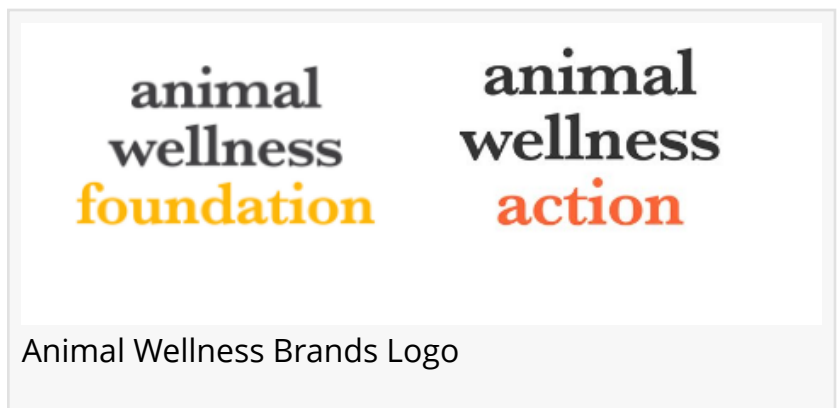


Marty Irby and Senator Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala.



Wayne Pacelle

warrants less in the way of penalties than a parking ticket, it's vital that the federal government step in and deliver justice. The action of the U.S. Dept. of Justice in saying that it will not tolerate animal fighting operations will reverberate from the shores of Orange Beach to Lookout Mountain and everywhere in between."



Indeed, while the Easterlings were one of America's biggest cockfighting syndicates, they are part of a far larger network of animal fighters in Alabama and throughout the United States that have made America the breeding ground for the global cockfighting industry. While some are destined for fighting pits in the U.S., hundreds of thousands of birds move from cockfighting farms here to dozens of nations throughout the world. AWA's June 2020 reported on several Alabamians, including Jerry Adkins of Slick Lizard Farms, who told a Filipino television broadcaster that he sells 6,000 birds a year to Mexico alone. With some birds fetching as much as \$2000 each, those illegal transactions could generate millions in gross sales.

AWA obtained a video of Brent Easterling interviewing with a Philippines-based cockfighting channel BNTV talking about his fighting birds and marketing them to worldwide audiences. AWA also obtained BNTV videos where 10 other cockfighters in Alabama extolling the prowess of their fighting birds. BNTV made 50 videos with U.S.-based cockfighters in recent years, and 11 of them came from Alabama-based cockfighters.

Under current federal law, it is a crime to:

Knowingly sponsor or exhibit an animal in a fighting venture;
Knowingly attend an animal fighting venture, or knowingly cause an individual who has not attained the age of 16 to attend an animal fighting venture;
Knowingly buy, sell, possess, train, transport, deliver, or receive any animal for purposes of having the animal participate in an animal fighting venture;
Knowingly use the mail service of the U.S. Postal Service, or any "written, wire, radio televisions or other form of communications in, or using a facility of, interstate commerce," to advertise an animal for use in an animal fighting venture, or to advertise a knife, gaff, or other sharp instrument designed to be attached to the leg of a bird for use in an animal fighting venture, or to promote or in any other manner further an animal fighting venture except as performed outside the U.S.;

Knowingly sell, buy, transport, or deliver in interstate or foreign commerce "a knife, gaff, or any other sharp instrument" designed or intended to be attached to the leg of a bird for use in an animal fighting venture.

Penalties for each violation of any one of these provisions allows for a maximum of 5 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine for perpetrators, except for an adult attending an animal fighting

venture. Penalties for an adult in attendance are 1 year in prison and a \$5,000 fine.

Plea documents in this case are available upon request.

Animal Wellness Action is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) organization with a mission of helping animals by promoting legal standards forbidding cruelty. We champion causes that alleviate the suffering of companion animals, farm animals, and wildlife. We advocate for policies to stop dogfighting and cockfighting and other forms of malicious cruelty and to confront factory farming and other systemic forms of animal exploitation. To prevent cruelty, we promote enacting good public policies, and we work to enforce those policies. To enact good laws, we must elect good lawmakers, and that's why we remind voters which candidates care about our issues and which ones don't. We believe helping animals helps us all.

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