

Congresswoman Andrea Salinas Calls on Biden Team to Endorse FIGHT Act to Tackle Animal Fighting in America

Cockfighting and dogfighting are cruel, widespread, and tangled up with other crimes

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, March 11, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- In a letter to President Biden, Congresswoman Andrea Salinas, D-Ore., called on his administration to endorse the Fighting Inhumane Gambling and High-Risk Trafficking (FIGHT) Act to crack down on the barbaric and lawless practices of dogfighting and cockfighting from Puerto Rico to Oklahoma to Guam. She noted that animal fighters consort with Mexican cartels and spread contagion in our homeland, threatening human health and America's commercial poultry sectors and incubating violence on both sides of the border.



Cockfighting Match

Co-led in the U.S. House by Reps. Don Bacon, R-Neb., and Salinas, and in the Senate by Senators Cory Booker, D-N.J., and John Kennedy, R-La., the FIGHT Act has endorsements from 500 organizations and agencies from the domains of animal welfare, law enforcement, agriculture, gaming, and conservation. No other animal welfare legislation has as much bipartisan support as H.R. 2742 and S. 1529

"Cockfighting contributed to the spread of the H5N1 avian flu in Asia, and it could do the same here," noted Rep. Salinas, an Agriculture Committee member, in the letter to President Biden. "Ten of the 15 outbreaks of virulent Newcastle Disease in the U.S. in recent decades were linked to illegal trafficking of fighting birds from Mexico into the United States." Just three outbreaks cost American taxpayers a billion dollars in containment and indemnity costs.

See <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/japan-hit-by-bird-flu-strain/>

See A review of virulent Newcastle disease viruses in the United States and the role of wild birds in viral persistence and spread - PMC (nih.gov)

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5659000/>

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Animal fighting spawns appalling and inexcusable cruelty and is well known to promote the spillover of violence and viruses in our communities, threatening community safety and health.”

*Wayne Pacelle, President of
Animal Wellness Action*

Calling animal fighting “cruel, illegal, and unacceptable,” Sen. Booker is also promoting the FIGHT Act from his perch on the Agriculture Committee. Booker led the successful effort in 2018 to extend all prohibitions against animal fighting to the U.S. territories. His co-author, Sen. Kennedy, called animal fighters “organized and dangerous—to people as well as innocent animals.” Rep. Bacon called it “disgusting” that people “profit off the cruel practice of forcing animals to fight for their lives.”

“Animal movements by people are the most important risk factor for spread of domestic animal infectious diseases,”

said Dr. Jim Keen, D.V.M., Ph.D., director of veterinary programs for the Center for a Humane Economy and a former 20-year infectious disease specialist with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. “If cockfighting birds are infected, they have the potential to expand the geography and duration of viral outbreaks throughout the U.S. and the world.” Dr. Keen’s 62-page report on cockfighting and avian diseases can be found at . <https://endcockfighting.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/01/Cockfighting-HPAI-vND-Report-12.30.22.pdf>

“Animal fighting not only spawns appalling and inexcusable cruelty, but it is well known to promote the spillover of violence and viruses in our communities, threatening community safety and human and animal health,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy and a key architect of all five preceding upgrades in the twenty-first century of the federal law against animal fighting. Hawaii’s largest-ever mass shooting occurred last year at a cockfight.

In late January 2024, 14 people were wounded and six murdered, including a 16-year-old from eastern Washington, at a cockfighting derby in Mexico. Months before, also [in Mexico, there was a massacre of 20](#), including a Chicago woman, at a cockfighting derby. In the [Philippines, there were 32 people kidnapped](#) from cockfights in 2022 and never found. In 2022, \$13 billion was wagered on online cockfights (e-sabong) there. The Philippines and Mexico are the two biggest foreign destinations for U.S.-bred fighting animals, with hundreds of thousands of fighting animals moving to Mexico alone in a trade commingled with fentanyl and other narcotics. See <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-03-11/online-cockfighting-wagers-rake-in-billions-in-the-philippines>

According to investigations by Animal Wellness Action and Showing Animals Respect and Kindness (SHARK), dozens of illegal fighting arenas openly operate in Puerto Rico. In Oklahoma, which has been dubbed the “cockfighting capital of the United States,” not one federal case has been brought against animal fighters since President Biden took office, even though the animal-welfare organizations have provided dossiers on dozens of major animal-fighting syndicates in

the state and pinpointed where fights occur on regular schedules.

See <https://www.sharkonline.org>

There's also been no enforcement action on Guam, where, over the last five years, Animal Wellness Action has documented 11,516 fighting birds entering Guam. "The birds were all shipped only for cockfighting and for no legitimate purposes," according to Thomas Pool, D.V.M., MPH, DACVPM, the former Territorial Veterinarian for Guam and now the senior veterinarian with Animal Wellness Action.

The U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the law enforcement arm of the USPS, has never made an arrest of anyone shipping birds through the U.S. mail for fights even though SEC. 26. U.S.C. 2156 makes that practice a federal felony. A series of SHARK investigations have documented major cockfighting operators delivering birds to post offices for shipment to other cockfighters, but USPS is ignoring the serial violations of law. The FIGHT Act dials up the existing prohibition by barring the shipment of any domesticated chicken rooster of six months or older.

"It is essential to understand that animal fighting is bound up with other crimes," wrote Stephen Luce, executive director of the Indiana Sheriffs' Association. "There have been many outbursts of violence at animal fights, and when animal fighting rings are broken up, our communities become safer and more livable." Sheriffs associations in Florida, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and other states have joined the effort to pass the FIGHT Act.

The FIGHT Act would allow for citizen suits against perpetrators, ban online gambling on animal fights, allow for criminal forfeiture of property used to commit animal fighting crimes, and forbid the use of the U.S. mail to ship adult roosters.

ABOUT

Animal Wellness Action is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) whose mission is to help animals by promoting laws and regulations at federal, state, and local levels that forbid cruelty to all animals. The group also works to enforce existing anti-cruelty and wildlife protection laws. Animal Wellness Action believes helping animals helps us all. X: @AWAction_News.

The Center for a Humane Economy is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(3) whose mission is to help animals by helping forge a more humane economic order. The first organization of its kind in the animal protection movement, the Center encourages businesses to honor their social responsibilities in a culture where consumers, investors, and other key stakeholders abhor cruelty. The Center believes helping animals helps us all. X: @TheHumaneCenter.

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