

Activist Corner

Alabaman “Everywoman” Janet Spahn Addresses Issues for Animals

By Nancy Blaney

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When Janet Spahn read a recent article in *Animal Guardian*, it reminded her of one tragedy and one near-tragedy in her own life and motivated her to take action. Janet previously had contacted her representatives about issues that concerned her, but in this case she effected an important and wide-reaching outcome—legislation.

Janet and her husband, Coy Wilburn, live on a farm outside Tusculumbia, AL, with a variety of animals, from cattle to dogs and cats. The house was also home to her mother and grandparents. Ten years ago, as her husband was draining antifreeze from a tractor, Janet spied Cricket, their Blue Heeler herding dog, lapping up some of the sweet, tasty—and toxic—liquid. “I immediately threw her in the car and raced to a vet,” she said. That vet was out and she had to travel across town to find another.

“The vet grabbed Cricket and administered the antidote right away,” Janet recalled. “He said, ‘We don’t usually see any dog that’s done this walk out of here.’” Fortunately, Cricket did survive. However, their neighbor’s dog, Butch, wasn’t so lucky—at the same time, he also accidentally drank antifreeze and died.

In December 2005, Janet was catching up on some reading. As she worked her way through her collection of *Animal Guardians*, she was intrigued by an article on the federal antifreeze bills. Motivated by that story, she wrote letters to her national and state representatives and senators in Washington, D.C. and Montgomery, AL and asked them to support bills to require the addition of a bittering agent to ethylene glycol antifreeze.

Janet describes herself as “very vocal” in contacting her elected representatives about things that matter to her. As she wrote

to them about antifreeze, she wondered if they would respond.

“I figured they all were involved in so many issues,” she recalled. “I didn’t know if this would work, if it would get any play, but it was worth a shot.”

One of Janet’s letters made an impact. She found out later that State Rep. Johnny “Mac” Morrow, read her correspondence and introduced a bill, HB 587, requiring that antifreeze sold in Alabama include denatonium benzoate or other bittering agents. Since then, Rep. Morrow has also introduced a state resolution, HJR 271, calling on the U.S. Congress to enact, and the President to sign, federal legislation requiring the addition of a bittering agent to antifreeze. Currently, the Antifreeze Bittering Act, has been introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives (H.R. 2567) and the U.S. Senate (S. 1110).

It is clear that Janet is passionate about animals. She opens her door—and her heart—to “whoever needs a home.” She and her husband take care of neighborhood stray cats and other abandoned animals. She is relieved to see that the courts are finally demonstrating more compassion and are taking animal cruelty more seriously. Janet has vowed to continue writing letters and drawing attention to important issues. If the antifreeze battle is an indication, Janet Spahn will continue to make a difference. 🐾

For more information on the dangers of antifreeze and what can be done to prevent these incidents, please see the feature story on page 10.



Nancy Blaney is a legislative and regulatory consultant with more than 20 years of Capitol Hill and animal welfare experience.