

Legislation – What’s Hot

***By Joan Miller, CFA Legislative Information Liaison
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Highlights of the PIJAC “Top to Top” conference

The second PIJAC (Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council) Top to Top Conference was again an excellent and stimulating experience. The conference addresses legislative and animal rights issues that face those in businesses involving pets.

This year the number of attendees was almost double that of last year. Everyone enjoyed being in Napa, California on April 23-25, 2013 for the premier pet “industry” gathering. Sessions discussed human demographics, pet population trends and legislation that is shaping the future for pet sellers and others in businesses dependent on cats, dogs, birds, fish and other animals.

CFA participants included George Eigenhauser, Roeann Fulkerson, Sharon Coleman (for The Animal Council) and myself. We had an opportunity to network with top executives from pet food companies, pet product manufacturers, pet stores, pet dealers, pet sitters, pet magazine editors and publishers. There were a few media people present, at least two rescue group representatives and the National Animal Interest Alliance (NAIA). The PIJAC staff did an excellent job.

One of the highlights of this conference was an interesting talk about “Shifting Demographics and Pet Preferences”. Michael Johnson, Vice President of Marketing, Chuck Latham Associates, presented the changing demographics, lifestyles and economic trends that will affect the future of the pet industry. The U.S. birth rate is at its lowest level since 1920. Single households (30 million) have tripled since 1980 and represent 27% of the U.S. households. He predicts a shift to smaller pets, and cats in particular, as the growing preference for “Baby Boomers”. These 50 to almost 70 year old seniors are downsizing, moving to vibrant cultural areas and living longer. Johnson said 45% are single and they want companionship, smaller pets and convenience.

Johnson predicts the next generation that will want cats as their preferred pets is “Gen Y”. They are now between 13 and 31 years old. They grew up with pets and money. They will marry later and have children later and will be multi cultural, urban, and will live in apartments and condos.

There were several presentations and panel discussions of special interest to CFA. Mike Canning, PIJAC President and CEO, discussed “Legislation and/or Regulation” and the impact on the industry. He emphasized the need to better communicate ways in which the pet industry is working to counter negative impressions. He announced PIJAC’s “Pet Effect” project that promotes public awareness of the

good things various companies and organizations do for animals. CFA is one of the organizations taking part in this project. PIJAC has also completely redesigned their website with emphasis on commitment and compassion for animals as well as the companionship benefit from animals. <http://www.pijac.org/peteffect>

To deal with serious legislative challenges Canning announced the PIJAC Legislative Defense Fund which would allow more lobbyists, an aggressive PR campaign, press coverage outreach and positive advertising. He urged industry leaders to help raise 4 million dollars for this initiative. He also spoke of the need for strong grass roots participation and the importance of promoting humane standards of care for animals.

One of the most successful parts of the conference was the Topic Roundtable Discussions. We all selected a different topic from 6 choices and joined a table of 10 or more. I was part of "Industry Messaging We Can All Use". We talked about ways in which we can stress positive messaging about the "industry". For starters several of us said we should be careful of our terminology, such as using words like "puppy mills" and even "industry", which are seen as negative by the pet owning public. It was mentioned that the "Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council" (PIJAC) may want to change its name to "Pet Animal Joint Advisory Council" (PAJAC) or the "Pet Interest Joint Advisory Council". We also discussed the need for short sound bites that promote pet ownership, such as "Pets Make Life Better !" Each group facilitator reported the outcomes and action items from the discussions. PIJAC has since continued the group discussions with online webinars. George attended the topic of "Self Regulation as an Alternative to Unwarranted Regulation and Legislation". This group reported the need for well established "best practices". They urged everyone involved with raising or selling pets to work on developing and agreeing on standards acceptable to the public with input from veterinarians, federal and state agencies and the American Kennel Club.

Conferences like this are important to keep CFA aware of the concerns and positions of other organizations and groups as well as to build understanding of our own interests. PIJAC has been for many years a good ally and they provide State bill tracking services for the CFA Legislative Group.

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