

News From _____

U.S. Senator
Robert C. Byrd
West Virginia
Phone (202) 224-3904

<http://byrd.senate.gov>

For Immediate Release: Thursday, July 19, 2007

Contact: John Bray, 202-224-3904

Byrd Condemns Dog Fighting

Washington, D.C... U.S. Senator Robert C. Byrd, D-W.Va., spoke out against the practice of dog fighting in the United States. Byrd, a dog owner who has long fought for animal rights, is greatly concerned with recent national news about the indictment of a well-known professional football player for running a dogfighting operation. Although laws exist that prohibit dogfighting and it is now a federal crime to allow this practice, animal welfare officials report that dogfighting is more popular today than ever.

For several days, the news has been saturated with stories about the indictment of a well-known professional football player for running a dogfighting operation.

I am not about to comment on that particular case. The man has been accused. He has not been convicted. We must wait until all the facts are in, and a verdict is rendered. The man cited in these recent news stories is innocent until proven guilty in a court of law. We must wait for the justice system to run its course.

But, the facts are already in, and the verdict has already been delivered, about the scourge of dogfighting in the United States. According to the Humane Society, there are about 40,000 dogfighting operations in the United States. The Deputy Manager of Dogfighting Issues for the Humane Society, John Goodwin, points out, "... dogfighting is at an epidemic level" in the United States. It involves urban areas as well as rural areas, and all sections of the country as it cuts across cultures and class and other socio and economic differences.

Dogfighting continues even though all fifty states now have laws on the books prohibiting dogfighting. Dogfighting is now a federal crime; yet, animal welfare officials report that dogfighting is more popular today than ever.

Hundreds of thousands, if not millions of dollars are often at stake in the breeding, training and selling of fighting dogs. Two dogs are placed in a pit and turned loose against each other. The fight can go on for hours as the dogs literally bite and rip the flesh off one another and bets as high as \$50,000 are placed. The brutality goes on until one of the dogs is seriously injured, or killed.

For that reason, Mr. President, dogfighting is regarded as a "blood sport."

While bloody, it is hardly a sport. It is a brutal, sadistic event motivated by barbarism and cruelty. One is left wondering: Who are the real animals ó the creatures inside or outside the ring?

The depravity of dogfighting is also a multi-million dollar business that involves training innocent, vulnerable creatures to kill, and putting them in a ring, to kill or be killed for the entertainment and/or profit of their owners and other spectators.

Undercover investigators who have infiltrated dogfighting rings have found blood-soaked dogs with life-threatening injuries that are left to die, as soon as they are no longer able to compete. They have found dogs with ripped ears, torn lips, genitals dangling from their bodies, eyes swollen shut, and faces riddled with punctures so severe that they were barely able to breath.

The dogs who do survive a fight often die days or even hours days after the fight from blood loss, shock, dehydration, exhaustion, or infection.

If the losing dog survives the ordeal, it is usually so mangled that it is no longer of any use. Therefore, it is put to death.

Even the winner of a dogfight commonly suffers from massive bleeding, ruptured lungs, broken bones, or other life-threatening injuries.

The training of these poor creatures to turn them into fighting machines is simply barbaric. Such practices as starvation of the animal, to encourage malice, and beatings, to build endurance are common. It involves teaching the dog to maul by using smaller animals such as cats or rabbits, or small dogs as "training bait."

The results of this most cruel business reaches beyond the fighting ring itself. There are cases of dogs trained to kill which have broken loose and mauled human beings to death. It is reported that dogfighters often involve their children in their bloody activities, with severe damaging psychological impact. Studies have revealed that children exposed to

dogfighting develop a greater acceptance of aggressive attitudes and behavior. They are taught to believe that violence is entertaining and that it is okay to inflict the cruelties they have observed. Dogfighting, reports the Houston Chronicle, simply "breeds violence."

Mr. President, as a dog owner and a dog lover, I cannot even begin to understand how human beings can be so cruel to man's best friend. Over the centuries, these creatures of God have made a place in our hearts as well as our homes. Dogs have endured as our devoted companions, which provide important emotional support to humans. Studies have shown that the mere petting of these social creatures can lower blood pressure in humans.

The affection that a dog provides is unlimited, unqualified, and unconditional. Ever the loyal companion, dogs protect us, assist those of us with afflictions, and provide hours of enjoyable companionship.

Therefore, I take great satisfaction in knowing that if the people allegedly involved in this outrageous business are found guilty, they will have to answer to our judicial system, especially now that Congress has made it a federal crime to engage in dogfighting.

God made man caretaker of the earth. God gave man the responsibility of tending to the natural world with dominion over animal life. We honor God when we treat all of His creatures responsibly and with decency and respect. The Scripture (Proverbs) tells us: "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast, but the tender mercies of the wicked are cruel."

The immortal Dante tells us that Divine Justice reserves special places in hell for certain categories of sinners. I am confident that the hottest places in hell are reserved for the souls of sick and brutal people who hold God's creatures in such brutal and cruel contempt.