

New Poll Shows Nebraska Voters Want All Sides Participating in Animal Welfare Debate

Survey by Lake Research Partners reveals support for farm animal welfare ballot measure and opposition to attacks on HSUS

(Media-Newswire.com) - A statewide public opinion survey shows that Nebraska voters think that the relationship between Gov. Dave Heineman and the nation's largest animal protection group, The Humane Society of the United States, shouldn't be antagonistic.

Conducted by Lake Research Partners, the poll* reveals that Nebraska voters support the humane treatment of farm animals, and they want all interested parties with a stake in the animal welfare debate to come together – farmers, consumers, food safety experts and animal welfare groups – to discuss the issues, and help the state avoid a divisive campaign.

The poll also shows that Nebraska voters view both Gov. Heineman and The HSUS very positively. In fact, the favorable ratings for both are nearly identical (HSUS 65 percent, Heineman 67 percent). Both the Governor and The HSUS have wide and deep support that cuts across the political spectrum, demographic groups and all regions of the state, and both have much higher favorability among voters than the Nebraska Farm Bureau Federation (45 percent favorable).

“These poll results confirm our historic ‘Nebraska way’ of approaching public policy debates – listening respectfully to all sides of complex issues, with an open mind,” said Jocelyn Nickerson, Nebraska state director for The HSUS. “Governor Heineman’s idea of shutting down all discussion and demonizing the nation’s largest animal protection group goes against that tradition, and just doesn’t sit well with Nebraska voters.”

Poll findings show that voters in Nebraska believe “farmers, consumers, animal welfare groups, and food safety experts all should have a seat at the table when it comes to discussing agricultural issues.” Fully 79 percent agree and more than half (58 percent) agree with that statement strongly. Only 17 percent disagree.

The Governor’s public statements advocating the exclusion of The HSUS—which has more than 50,000 supporters in Nebraska— from any debate over animal welfare related legislation, and keeping other experts from the discussion is a view that Nebraskans reject.

When questioned directly about Gov. Heineman’s combative remarks about The HSUS, most voters (61 percent) say they want the Governor to open a dialogue with The HSUS, while very few want him to continue his confrontational, exclusionary approach (25 percent say “refuse an open dialogue”). A majority of voters also agree that “working with animal welfare groups like The HSUS will make Nebraska’s farms stronger by making them more humane” (56 percent agree, 35 percent disagree).

A majority of voters also indicate they would support a ballot initiative to ban gestation crates for breeding sows (53 percent support, with 30 percent opposed, and 17 percent undecided) or an initiative to prohibit the confinement of egg-laying hens, breeding pigs, or veal calves in a manner that

does not give them enough room to stand up, lie down or stretch their limbs (54 percent support, with 34 percent opposed, and 11 percent undecided).

Added Nickerson, "Here in the Cornhusker State, Nebraskans support the humane treatment of all animals, including animals raised for food."

*Poll Methodology: Lake Research Partners designed and administered this survey of a stratified sample of 500 registered voters who had voted in the 2008 presidential election or had registered to vote since then. The poll was conducted by phone January 31 through February 3, 2011, using professional interviewers. The margin of error for the full sample is +/-4.4 percentage points.