



# Our Hen House

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## Interview with Anthony Bellotti

By OUR HEN HOUSE

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*Following is a transcript of an interview with **ANTHONY BELLOTTI** conducted by **JASMIN SINGER** and **MARIANN SULLIVAN** of [Our Hen House](#), for the [Our Hen House podcast](#). The interview aired on Episode 204.*

JASMIN: Now, let's transition to our interview with Anthony Bellotti. Anthony heads up the White Coat Waste Project, and he and his organization are really going after government-funded vivisection on the grounds that it is a total waste of the taxpayer's money. So, I am thrilled to bring you Anthony Bellotti.

Anthony Bellotti is the founder and executive director of the White Coat Waste Project, a new campaign to expose and eliminate the waste, fraud, and abuse in the government's taxpayer-funded animal experimentation budget. Anthony is also a cofounding board director of the Humane Research Council. Anthony holds a BA from the University of Pennsylvania and an MA from the George Washington University's Graduate School of Political Management, with concentrations in corporate public affairs and campaign management. Learn more at [whitecoatwaste.com](http://whitecoatwaste.com).

Welcome to Our Hen House, Anthony!

ANTHONY: Oh, thank you so much for having me here. I'm very pleased to be here. Thanks again for inviting me.

JASMIN: We're thrilled about it, and we're really, really intrigued by the White Coat Waste Project, this new campaign that you have that is exposing and eliminating so much of the waste and abuse in the government's animal experimentation budget. So, I want to talk to you about that. How much is the government spending on animal research?

ANTHONY: That's the real question, that's the real question. I like to say, what we know is the floor of the spending. We do not know the ceiling. In other words, this problem is so big, we don't know how big it is. What we know is what they admit to, so we use their own conservative estimates. Their estimate is about 47%, 47 cents on the dollar, that NIH, National Institutes of Health, pays out to these colleges, universities, animal experimentation professors, 47 cents on your dollar, *your* dollar, tax dollars, goes out to animal experiments. What does that mean? Conservatively, that means about 12 *billion*, billion with a "b," 12 billion a year, annually, every year, spent not on human health but on animal experiments. Chances are it's probably a lot higher, 'cause that's just NIH totals, and that's just what they admit to. It doesn't include numbers like USDA spending, Pentagon

spending, EPA spending. So, we like to say, we know the floor at about 12 billion. Ceiling, I've heard estimates sometimes as high as 16, 18, 20 billion a year, just in taxpayer funding.

MARIANN: Yeah, no way around it, it's a lot of money. So, do you consider *all* of this money to be wasted? Do you consider *all* spending on animal research to be wasteful, or are you distinguishing projects that have some kind of scientific justification, just looking for the ones that don't?

ANTHONY: Well, that's a good question. They like to say, sometimes they say it's in the eye of the beholder. If it's in your congressional district, it's not waste; it's not pork. If it's in someone else's congressional district, it's pork. The truth is, the majority of the stuff that we're looking at and that we're focusing on, we consider waste. Our position is we do not expect, or we do not believe it is moral, we do not believe it is ethical, we do not believe it is wise, sound science, to spend any tax dollars on animal experiments. We don't take up positions, for example, on spending in the private sector. We don't like it, but we also don't work on that. We don't work on, for example, big cosmetic companies' or big pharmaceutical companies' spending. They spend money on it too. But the real problem in the room, the real issue, is not Big Cosmetics, not Big Pharma, but Big Government. So, that's really what we concentrate on for the wasteful spending.

JASMIN: Frequently animal research that seems ridiculous is defended on the grounds that basic research that isn't specifically targeted at a specific goal is the only way that scientists will come up with the kind of new information that leads to innovative change. How do you respond to this?

ANTHONY: I'm still waiting for that. I mean, our position is very simple. If that's the case, let's assume, let's play devil's advocate for a minute. Let's assume that that is the case, that it does lead to groundbreaking, innovative change. Well, why do taxpayers have to fund it? Let them find their own funding. Surely the private sector can do it faster, cheaper, more efficiently. Let them spend. Let them do it. Get it off the taxpayer's back. Stop forcing taxpayers to pay for something they don't like, don't need, and doesn't work.

MARIANN: So, how does the White Coat Waste Project -- we practiced before but I still have trouble saying it -- identify the waste, abuse, and fraud in federally funded animal research? Do you look for particular studies that you know that people are going to be alarmed about, or do you just go after it generally? How do you identify the studies that you are really going to focus on?

ANTHONY: Sure. Well, we have to be targeted with respect to running the campaigns we're going to be running. Now that we're just starting up -- we're a very young organization, we're just starting up now, really. And as we allocate resources, the key to strategy is about allocating resources. How do you allocate resources such that you can make a difference? So, we have to be realistic about that. In that respect, some of the most interesting targets that we're looking at for campaigning are the recreational drug experiments on animals, illegal recreational street drug experiments on animals. A lot of people would be surprised -- maybe not in this audience, but this is a smart audience, but in the general public -- would be surprised to know that there's an institute called NIDA, National Institute for Drug Abuse, taxpayer-funded, you and I, that's where our paycheck goes, so that they can coke up monkeys, give crack, methamphetamines, heroin, street drugs, on the taxpayer's dime and test them for 10, 20, 30, 40 years, over and over again, to lead to conclusions that drug

abuse is bad for you. That's the kind of stuff that we're most interested in right now. We think it's the epitome of waste, the epitome of fraud, and the epitome of abuse.

JASMIN: And can you give us some examples of what you consider wasteful government funding, more specific examples?

ANTHONY: Sure, I'll give you a specific example from that agency. UCLA is a cesspool of waste, fraud, and abuse. For example, at UCLA, they have, they're a cesspool of testing things like alcohol on mice, testing so-called "alcoholic rat model." Things like that have no clinical relevance to human alcoholics. Look, alcoholism and drug abuse are serious problems in the human population, but to think that we can *model* it in an animal. And in their own words, it doesn't work, the model. They don't get "addicted" in the same sense that people get addicted.

But to answer your question, there's one example at the University of Minnesota, for example, that's been going on over 30 years. Professor Marilyn Carroll is her name; she's very infamous in the animal protection community, and for good reason. She's been abusing her taxpayer payouts since, I think, over 30 years. It's been at least over 30 years. I believe the number one movie in America, when she first got on the government dole, was *Return of the Jedi*. The number one album in America when she first started taking payouts was Michael Jackson's *Thriller*.

MARIANN: That doesn't seem that long ago. I'm only kidding.

ANTHONY: Well, I remember it 'cause I'm an old man. No, I'm not old, but I mean, we think it's far too long for somebody to be collecting payouts to abuse animals.

JASMIN: Yeah, yeah.

MARIANN: So, in addition to drug abuse research, what other types of research do you generally focus on, and then, what kind of specific studies have you found in those that you think are particularly easy targets for this kind of argument?

ANTHONY: One of the interesting campaigns that we're looking at very closely are the -- I'll give you a couple. There's the -- a lot of these beagle studies, treadmill studies, exercise studies, for example, obesity and exercise studies, we think are, I don't believe "easy targets"; I'm not sure I would agree with you on that phrasing of "easy targets." I don't believe in pushover experiments, 'cause I believe that they're all -- every campaign that's worth its salt is a difficult campaign, but what we believe are ripe targets, so to speak, what we believe are appropriate targets for what we do best.

And some of those examples include things like, in Oregon, there's an obesity study where they fatten up pregnant monkeys and then -- literally, fatten them up to make them -- feed them sugary diets, put them in small, tiny wire mesh cages where they have no room to move around, force feed them junk food, then conclude that diet and exercise is good for you. They look at the brain; then they look at their babies, kill them, dissect their brains, and determine whether, "well, you know, maybe serotonin's going this way and dopamine's going this way, and therefore, they have an anxiety disorder." I mean, it's nonsense. It's ludicrous that this stuff has any relevance, clinical relevance, to human health. It doesn't. Those are more examples of the kind of stuff that we're looking at.

JASMIN: Anthony, do you have a scientific background or any firsthand experience with animal research?

ANTHONY: I do, I do. Not a lot of people know about this, but I actually do have a little experience, not so much in the scientific realm. We have great -- we have a first-rate scientific advisory team that we're gonna be rolling out for White Coat Waste Project, physicians, medical doctors, veterinarians, PhDs, all those good people with an alphabet soup after their name. We've got that coming in, we'll roll that out next month, in January. But with my background, as per your question -- a while back, it was the summer of 1995, and I was in between my junior and senior year of high school. And I ended up with firsthand internship, only for --

JASMIN: So was I, Anthony!

ANTHONY: What's that?

JASMIN: I was also in between my junior and senior year of high school then.

ANTHONY: Oh, so we're the same age!

JASMIN: Yeah.

ANTHONY: All right.

JASMIN: Anyway, go on.

ANTHONY: Yeah, I was class of '96.

JASMIN: I just wanted to interject and say, "ah."

ANTHONY: High school class of '96, yeah.

JASMIN: Oh, I was '97, okay.

ANTHONY: Okay, so we're --

JASMIN: You are an old man, clearly.

ANTHONY: All right, so I win the prize. But --

JASMIN: Yeah. Well, actually, no, actually, Mariann wins the prize, but we digress.

ANTHONY: So, going back in time to the summer of 1995. I was in between my junior and senior year of high school, and I ended up by chance, through a friend of a friend of a friend who had an internship available, I was buddies with his son and long story short, they said, "Hey you guys, we're looking for a summer internship, you need something to do? We'll give you an internship." Oh, where's the internship? It's in the Department of Laboratory Animal Sciences at the hospital in Manhattan where I ended up. So, I ended up getting a crash course in the stuff in for, again, I don't want to oversell what I did, I was only there about seven weeks at the Department of Lab Animal Sciences in Manhattan. But I'll tell you, it was the wakeup call and the best thing that ever happened to me because I wasn't a vegetarian, I wasn't an animal activist, I didn't know anything about animal protection. I didn't know anything about anything. I was a 17-year-old kid looking to go to college in a

year or two. And I'll tell you, when you see it firsthand, there's something different about it, when you get immersed in it. And I remember saying to myself loud and clear; I remember this like it was yesterday. On my first day, after seeing it, you know, your first experience is that shock and awe, and that shock and horror. And you say to yourself, "If this is one of the good labs, what the heck are they doing in the bad ones?"

JASMIN: Mm-hm.

ANTHONY: That was what I asked myself. I remember that clear as day. And I never looked back. I was at college the next year, or about a year later. And I sort of learned -- I said, I have to learn more about this, I gotta get involved, I gotta learn more about this. I became a vegetarian on my 21st birthday, cold-turkey I went. But I always had a soft spot for the animals in laboratory issue because I had firsthand experience seeing it, and also because I thought my unique positioning on the issue, that we could really do some good for this issue. And that's the long-term genesis of the White Coat Waste Project.

MARIANN: Yeah, that's a really moving story, and I wish more people had that reaction. Too many people seem to become enculturated to it rather than to resist it. But getting back to the White Coat Waste Project and its work, I know you're a relatively new organization, really quite new.

ANTHONY: We're very new, just started.

MARIANN: So, you've explained a little bit about how you're identifying what you think are the projects that are ripe for this kind of approach, but can you tell us what your plans are for doing something about it, for disseminating the information so that it will lead to change?

ANTHONY: Absolutely. To lead to change, we came to a conclusion. I consider myself sort of as an outsider in the movement because I've never had a job full-time inside the animal protection movement. I never worked for an animal protection organization full-time. I've done -- I'm a political consultant by trade. For the last ten years I've been in Washington doing political consulting. So, I think the team that I brought together to look at this problem of animal experimentation has a little bit different perspective on it, a little bit of a different viewpoint on it. And here's what I mean by that, to answer your question about making change. We looked at the numbers, very closely, polling data, and I've got good news and bad news for you. The good news is, if you look at the polling data on this issue, what the public actually thinks about animal experimentation, it's never been more vulnerable than it is now. That's good news. This stuff has dropped from the high of something like 69, 70% in 1999 for public approval to hemorrhaging about 16 percentage points in the last decade. Something happened last decade; this stuff is vulnerable.

But on the other hand, why did the number of animals keep going up? Why this disconnect? Why this disconnect between public opinion falling and number of animals abused going up? Well, we looked at this problem and we came to the conclusion that government is not the solution, it's the problem. It's government spending that's the problem. As long as they're dumping money into this system of taxpayer-funded animal experimentation, taking your money, robbing you, taking your money and forcing you, constricting you into paying for this junk, as long as they do that, there's a market being made for it. So, somebody's got to attack the spending problem, and that's what we're setting up to do. We're looking at the spending side of things, so everything we work on is on the taxpayer-funded side of things.

We really work on three buckets. We have an approach that's basically a campaign-style approach with three buckets: research, you know, ferretting out this information, digging up the dirt, finding the facts, following the money -- it's all about following the money -- and this is all publicly disclosed information that's available in databases and government records.

So, step 1: real solid research. I was an opposition researcher during the 2006 election cycle for Governor Schwarzenegger in 2006. So, I've learned a thing or two about the value of good, solid research to win a campaign.

Step 2: So, if step 1 is to find the waste, step 2 is to expose the waste. You're gonna see some very creative ad campaigns coming in the next year or so, certainly in the next year, starting up this year, well, ready at the end of the year. In 2014, advertising campaigns to get the word out and keep pushing down at public opinion for animals, that critical support level, push it past 50%. You see, we need more sustained ad campaigns, digitally, cable, video. Those are the kind of techniques that we're gonna bring to the table, advertising-campaign-style ads to really drive down support for the taxpayer-funded system. We have a real problem with awareness for animals in laboratories. In fact, Humane Research Council, which I'm a board member of, has tracked public awareness for animals in all the different abusive industries. And the fact remains that animals in laboratories, public awareness is the lowest for that, of all the animal industries. Something like 3% of all people call themselves "very aware." So, we need more advertising, more creative ads, more sustained ads.

And finally, 3: lobbying and coalition-building, bringing new people into the movement, bringing new blood into what we're doing, people who may not necessarily care too much about animals in laboratories, but care a lot about spending, and care a lot about waste, and care a lot about Big Government. We think we can get those people. That's our 3-step approach.

MARIANN: Well, I mean, it sounds great. And one of the questions that I had planned on asking you was how you're going to avoid just preaching to the converted, but I assume you feel that your ad campaign can really reach people who have not previously thought about this issue.

ANTHONY: It's very important not to preach to just the converted. You want to -- you certainly need to mobilize and activate your converted people and get them engaged. But at the same time, it's important to bring -- like you're saying -- you gotta bring that new blood into this. And the way you do that is you take an issue that's been frozen for a while and you repackage it, and rather you reposition the issue as not just an animal issue, not just a bad science issue, but an issue that is a fiscal issue, is a spending issue, is a waste issue, hence White Coat Waste.

JASMIN: Yeah.

ANTHONY: That's how you tap into new coalitions.

JASMIN: Absolutely. And also, it seems like the approach you're taking, focusing on federal waste, is particularly suited to bring together folks from various places on the traditional political spectrum and from both sides of the aisle.

ANTHONY: That's right.

JASMIN: Do you agree with that?

ANTHONY: Oh, I think you just nailed it. It's what it's about. I always like to say, for many years, animals should not be a partisan issue. It's not a Democrat thing or a Republican thing.

MARIANN: Oh, I'm so with you! I always say that too.

ANTHONY: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah..

MARIANN: I always say that too. It's the one unifying issue -- well, maybe there are other unifying issues, but this one is a unifying issue.

ANTHONY: Yeah! I mean, I personally am a Republican, but our organization is nonpartisan because this is an issue that should bring Democrats and Republicans together. It's not a partisan football. But the fact is, we can bring new people to the table who have never been here before. People, again, who care about the pocketbook, and maybe they don't want to spend their money on animal experiments. Maybe they would rather spend it on their kid's mortgage -- excuse me, on their mortgage or on their kid's education.

MARIANN: Well, and their kid's mortgage. Whatever.

ANTHONY: And we also think that the timing is ripe too for this campaign because the economy's not too good. People are suffering. Is this really how you want your money spent -- beagles on treadmills, or crack for primates, or obesity experiments on monkeys? Is this really how you want to spend your money?

MARIANN: Yeah, I totally agree that this is a way to bring together people coming at this from different angles. And hopefully they can all ultimately agree on also caring about animals. But one thing I'm wondering -- you've said that there has been a lot of shift in public opinion. Have you seen any shifts within the scientific community?

ANTHONY: Yes, we have. This -- 2013, the verdict was decisive. Within the scientific -- well, let me rephrase that -- the verdict in terms of the scientific news was decisive in showing just how awful these animal so-called "models" -- I mean they're animals, these are living creatures, they call them "models," but that's what they do. The fact remains that the verdict, the scientific verdict, things that Dr. Ray Greek had been telling us for years, Dr. Neal Barnard had been telling us for years, well, they were right! The verdict came in. We look at things like the Warren Study in Massachusetts on just how -- it was well-publicized in the New York Times about just how awful mouse data is. It stinks! Useless. And you look at things like that; you look at things like the ION decision with the chimps. You look at things like the failure of the AIDS vaccine. You look at things like the John, Dr. Ioannidis's study on just how rampant the bias is for animal experimentation reports. Where are the cures, in that sense? They're not coming because these models are terrible that they're working with. Animal models don't work. They're broken. And as long as it doesn't work, that just adds more power to our argument, is do you really want to spend something, your money on something you don't like and doesn't work?

JASMIN: So, what are some of the new directions that scientists are headed in that might replace and work far better than experiments on animals?

ANTHONY: There's been some interesting stuff in recent months. You see things like 3D printing, cell cultures. You see things like the adult stem cells. You see things like organs on a chip. Every day, truly, you see a new newsbreak about some new scientific breakthrough. To be honest with you, I'm not even a big fan personally of the word "alternative" because remember, these models are broke. I don't want an alternative to something that's broke. I want something that works, so valid methods, effective methods. That's what we really need. And the truth is, it's never been more promising. Think about it. This is old science we're talking about, 19th century French-style science, Claude Bernard, 19th century-style science. Why is it that every facet of technology in the world moves forward, and animal experimentation takes, *always* takes a step backwards?

JASMIN: Mm, Mm-hm

MARIANN: Yeah.

ANTHONY: Makes no sense! Yet we're shoveling money, keeping these people flush with cash. They're not even finding their own funding; they're more than happy to take your money for it. It just doesn't make sense.

MARIANN: Yeah, it's really so similar to the animal agriculture business. I mean, they're just two industries that are stuck completely in a world that doesn't exist anymore. I'm very inspired by your energy and your passion here, Anthony. Can you tell us how people can find out more about your work and how they can help the White Coat Waste Project's efforts?

ANTHONY: Absolutely. We're a young, very, very young -- we're just rolling out now. So, this is the perfect time for people to go to [www.whitecoatwaste.com](http://www.whitecoatwaste.com). They can check us out there, join us online, sign up, sign our petition, get on board. Check us out on Facebook; we're there. We need more volunteers, we need more activists. We need everybody to get around this issue of taxpayer-funded animal experimentation.

JASMIN: Well, excellent. We are so glad that we learned about the White Coat Waste Project.

MARIANN: And I can't wait to see those ads start rolling out in 2014.

JASMIN: Me too.

ANTHONY: We're looking forward to it too.

JASMIN: And Anthony, I'm just so grateful to you for being out there doing what you're doing.

ANTHONY: Thank you.

JASMIN: I wish there were more people like you. But I really am given hope for the world when I talk to you.

ANTHONY: We're gonna find them. We're gonna find them and bring them in.

JASMIN: Yeah! That's right. Well, thank you so much for joining us today on Our Hen House, and we will catch up with you soon.

ANTHONY: Thank you for having me.

JASMIN: Yeah.

ANTHONY: I had a great time.

JASMIN: Me too. Take care, Anthony.

ANTHONY: Take care. Bye-bye, guys.

JASMIN: Bye.

That was Anthony Bellotti from the White Coat Waste Project.