

Most Influential: If animals could vote, Judie Mancuso would be president

On Jan. 1, three laws will kick in that protect non-humans. Mancuso, of Laguna Beach, started them all.

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It's been 16 years since Judie Mancuso walked away from a lucrative tech job so she could dedicate her life to the politics of saving animals.

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Since that switch, the Laguna Beach resident has spearheaded 36 bills aimed at making life better for non-humans, including 17 bills that have been signed into state law. Three of those new laws will take effect Jan. 1, following a record-setting run of legislation that led some in Sacramento to dub 2019 the “Year of the Animals.”

”Judie Mancuso’s hard work ... has brought issues regarding animal cruelty and animal welfare to the forefront of the legislative agenda statewide,” said State Sen. Cathleen Galgiani, D-Stockton, who partnered with Mancuso on a bill that will end animal testing for cosmetics sold in California.

Some of the laws Mancuso has pushed are being considered, or enacted, in other states and nations.

Still, she insists, “We have a long way to go.”

That’s why the curly-haired, vegan mother of eight — three dogs and five cats, that is — shows no signs of slowing down.

Mancuso recently convinced actresses Diane Keaton, Maggie Q and Louise Linton, wife of U.S. Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin, to join the board of her nonprofit, Social Compassion in Legislation. Through that group, the 56-year-old is gearing up to introduce new state and federal legislation in 2020 that will touch on everything from horse racing to climate change.

This version of her life — the one filled with courting politicians and fighting corporations — couldn’t be farther removed from the one Mancuso was living three decades ago.

In 1988, the St. Louis native was sharing a Hollywood apartment with a roommate. She was working in computers by day, dancing her nights away and, like a good Sicilian, eating plenty of meat.

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Mancuso befriended an upstairs neighbor, who happened to be journalist and animal activist Keely Shaye Smith. Smith gave Mancuso the book “Diet for a New America,” which laid bare the plight of factory farm animals. Smith, who would later marry actor Pierce Brosnan, also showed Mancuso an ABC News segment that she’d produced about euthanasia at animal shelters.

The book, and the news story, left Mancuso in tears — and changed the course of her life.

Mancuso stopped eating animals. She also began fostering pets and working with animal rights groups. Those efforts snowballed until, at 40, Mancuso decided to focus full-time on animal welfare advocacy.

Her first foray into lawmaking came in the wake of Hurricane Katrina in 2005. While spending thousands of hours creating a computer program to help pet owners reunite with animals they lost during the storm, Mancuso heard Los Angeles Animal Services General Manager Ed Boks call for people to help clear Southern California shelters to make room for animals still homeless weeks after Katrina. She knew the only way to curb overcrowding was to reduce the population, so she asked Boks to help her develop a bill that would require Californian residents to spay and neuter their pets unless they paid for an annual exemption.

While Mancuso was in Los Angeles to meet with Boks, she learned of a legal dilemma that was cruel to animals.

An animal control officer explained that he frequently was called by people reporting an animal being left in a car on a hot Southern California day — but that he usually couldn’t help. By law, he said, only police were allowed to intervene.

“We have to stand by and watch dogs die of brain seizures in hot cars because we can’t get in to free them and save their lives,” Mancuso recalls the officer saying.

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So, even as Mancuso continued work on the spay and neuter bill — hoping it would find support in Sacramento despite encountering stiff resistance from commercial pet breeders — she also helped rush through a bill that made it a crime to leave animals in hot cars. That 2006 proposal, [Senate Bill 1806](#), which also allowed animal control officers to use any means necessary to free endangered pets, was her first piece of legislation to become law. She was hooked.

In 2007, Mancuso launched Social Compassion in Legislation, a nonprofit that urges legislators to pass laws to help animals. A decade later, she celebrated passage of her biggest bill yet.

The [Pet Rescue and Adoption Act](#), authored by Assemblyman Patrick O'Donnell, D-Long Beach, made California the first state that requires all pet stores to sell dogs, cats and rabbits that came from shelters and nonprofit rescues rather than from breeders. As reports emerge of [puppy mills skirting that law](#), Mancuso said she's eyeing tweaks to the legislation aimed at helping local authorities go after bad players.

Mancuso's second landmark bill is the [Cruelty Free Cosmetics Act](#), which will make it illegal as of Jan. 1 for retailers to sell new makeup or personal hygiene products that have been tested on animals. The bill was signed into law by Gov. Jerry Brown in 2018, but it's been rolled out slowly to give companies time to comply.

"We will be saving millions and millions of animals' lives through this bill," Mancuso said.

Also kicking in on Jan. 1 is the [Cruelty Free Circus Act](#), which prohibits wild animals, such as elephants and bears, from being used in any circus in California. A third bill [bans trapping native animals](#) such as foxes and beavers for fur.

A fourth bill sponsored by Mancuso was signed into law this year but won't take effect until 2022. [The bill](#) expands by seven the list of protected animal skins that

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can't be sold in California. One of the creatures to gain protection under the bill is the hippopotamus, which is listed as "vulnerable" by international wildlife organizations.

Despite those successes, Mancuso also had setbacks in 2019.

A couple of the 11 bills she introduced were turned into two-year bills, such as one that would require public schools to offer vegetarian meals for students. Others died in Sacramento, such as one bill that would have banned the state from using fish to test the toxicity of hazardous waste. And others were [vetoed by Gov. Gavin Newsom](#), including a bill authored by State Sen. Ling Ling Chang, R-Diamond Bar, that would have required people to microchip their pets.

"Judie has been an outstanding partner," Chang said.

Mancuso hopes to reintroduce revised versions of some of those bills in 2020.

Another issue she hopes to tackle is the wave of horse deaths at Santa Anita and other racetracks. Mancuso hopes to ban the practice, common in horse racing, of drugging a horse so it can run with certain preexisting conditions.

She also wants to make it harder for people to get permits to shoot mountain lions, forcing them to try nonlethal methods to keep livestock or other property safe before getting out their guns.

Meanwhile, Mancuso's group has been quietly building a federal legislative presence in Washington, D.C.

In 2020, she hopes to pursue a federal law that would make it illegal for international puppy mills to send dogs to the U.S. And she's eyeing her most complex legislation yet — a law that would encourage struggling dairy and other animal farmers to convert into new businesses centered around plant-based proteins.

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If Mancuso's legislative work in California is a sign of how she'll take on Washington, state Sen. Galgiani said she wouldn't want to be her opponent.

"She has the heart of an activist and the skill of a seasoned politician, which makes her doubly formidable," Galgiani said.

"Her success speaks for itself."