CANINE CORNER

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Pet Night

On Capitol Hill

Collaboration. It means "two or more people or organisations working together to create, complete, or achieve a shared goal." Collaboration isn't always easy to achieve when organisations have their own priorities, funding streams, and agendas. But it can and does work.

Take, for example, the collaboration between The Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI), the American Pet Products Association, the Pet Food Institute and the World Pet Association (WPA). Working together, these organisations organise Pet Week on Capitol Hill, a week-long series of virtual meetings and in-person visits in Washington, DC — all with the theme about the imperative role pets play on human health. The week serves to highlight pressing issues related to pet ownership.

The events of the week support dialogue with politicians and other stakeholders, culminating in Pet Night on Capitol Hill, a night to celebrate the positive impact pets have in the USA. Pet Night brings members of Congress, their staff and pet industry leaders together to discuss policies that advance public health and protect the human-animal bond.

"Pet Night on Capitol Hill has become an annual focal point for the pet care community where we celebrate the importance of pets in society," said Mike Karsting, senior vice president of the WPA. "Pet Night is a chance to showcase the bipartisan nature of pets to our nation's lawmakers and the importance of pets as family for individual, community and public health."

Steven Feldman, president of HABRI, said, "There's nothing quite like Pet Night on Capitol Hill; everyone shares their stories about pets that positively impacted their lives. Pets are a positive force for good, and Pet Night honours our shared experiences of the human-animal bond."

"Pet-friendly policies touch almost every facet of society — from housing to veteran well-being, public health, food safety and more," said Elise Fennig, president and chief executive officer of the Pet Food Institute.

"We are proud to co-host this important event and to educate and support Congress in advocating for policies that keep people and pets happy and healthy, together."

During the event, the Animal Health Institute recognised the winners of the Cutest Pets on Capitol Hill contest, which highlights the cutest animals owned by members of Congress and their staff. The contest has been held each year for 18 years. The 2026 winners included:

- Riley as the cutest dog, owned by Stephanie Gamache, who serves on the Senate Commerce Committee
- Jax as the cutest cat, owned by Sophie Attiliis, who works for Representative Morgan Griffith (Republican/Virginia)
- Fried Rice, a shrimp, as the cutest exotic pet, owned by Logan Holt who works for Representative Stephanie Bice (Republican/Oklahoma)

At Pet Night, the WPA presented its Legislative Pawsitive Impact Award to Representative Glenn Thompson, chairman of the House Agriculture Committee and a senior member of the Education and Workforce Committee, for his support of the Healthy Dog Importation Act. This Act is a US federal bill designed to strengthen oversight and screening requirements for all live dogs imported into the United States.

Imagine the possibilities if Dogs New Zealand joined other NZ organisations working in the dog/pet space to create something similar in New Zealand? It could serve as a platform for promoting animal welfare, responsible dog ownership, and the importance of supporting people who bring a pet into their lives — for mental health, social connectedness and other important benefits.

Pet Night at Parliament anyone?

This column represents the author's reflections on her interaction with the dog world and does not necessarily express any official position of Dogs New Zealand.