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(Photos from the Tiger Truck Stop Facebook page, SaveTony.com and TigerTruckStop.com may be used with this release as needed.)

Governor signs controversial bill

(June 20, 2014 Grosse Tete La.) The effort to save a Bengal tiger from exploitation by professional animal activist exhibitors was successfully finalized June 18 when Governor Bobby Jindal signed Senate Bill 250 into Louisiana Law.

Activists had worked their way through legal loopholes to try to force Michael Sandlin, owner of the Tiger Truck Stop and its 14 year old tiger Tony, to give up his cat, but the Legislature made itself clear that a law enacted in 2006 was intended to allow responsible private owners who met all federal and state regulations to keep their exotic animals.

The bill was the subject of much controversy, and animal rights activists from all over the world became embroiled in petitioning lawmakers with their pleas to "rescue Tony". Their knowledge about the condition of the tiger and his habitat was the result of misinformation, lies and deception on the part of a few activists that stood to gain from his relocation, according to Sandlin. "We spent a lot of time and energy putting the truth into the hands of the decision makers", Sandlin said, "and at last the truth won out".

Mr. Sandlin is known as an animal welfare advocate, which is borne out by the fact that at one time his facility had more live tiger births than any other facility in the nation. He stressed that the difference between welfare and "rights" activism is that the activist makes no real effort to follow up or care for the animal once it has been given its "human" rights. Animal welfare experts from around the United States have concurred that the habitat at the Tiger Truck Stop is one of the finest private exhibits in the country, and has excelled in diet, veterinary care, and spaciousness.

Claims have also been made by adverse activists that Mr. Sandlin has repeatedly violated United States Department of Agriculture regulations in caring for his animals, but these allegations have been disproven. USDA inspectors have certified that the Grosse Tete, LA facility meets or exceeds all federal regulations, and has never had its USDA permit revoked.

The State of Louisiana's Department of Wildlife and Fisheries also has a permitting process, and recognized that Tiger Truck Stop was fully in compliance with Louisiana Law in granting two permits for the tiger. The animal activists tried different ways to get the permits revoked, and were successful only when they got a court, in a suit against DWF by Animal Legal Defense Fund, an activist group based in California, to overturn the permit based on law that was later discovered not to apply to the exhibit at Grosse Tete. This injustice was rectified by SB250.

Denham Springs, La. lawyer Bob Morgan, who led the lobbying effort at the statehouse, commented that "once the legislators were told the truth about the tiger's situation, it was a watershed moment for them. They did not like being lied to by the activists about the tiger". Mr. Morgan is an attorney with expertise in Louisiana property law, and sees this as a clear cut victory for Mr. Sandlin's property rights. "We applied the truth, and it won," he said.

For Tony, and the thousands of visitors that view his exhibit at Tiger Truck Stop, the legislation means that he will be able to live his life out in the care and protection of Mr. Sandlin, in the spacious home with the people he has known since he was a 6 month old cub, and continue to delight visitors to the exhibit.

Schoolchildren mobbed the tables displaying information about Tony at the Capitol Rotunda during the legislative session. More than 1000 DVD's about Tony's life were given free to the student visitors and other interested people.

Mr. Sandlin offered his final comment - "We would like to thank Governor Jindal, Senator Rick Ward, Rep. Major Thibaut, the Louisiana Legislature, the Tiger Truck Stop legal & lobby teams, friends, family, employees, loyal customers and our local community, as well as the many supporters from around the world for taking a stand against animal rights terrorism. It is a great victory for private exotic animal owners, personal freedoms, and the protection of all of our animals."