

= Pawnee Zoo =

" Pawnee Zoo " is the second season premiere of the American comedy television series Parks and Recreation , and the seventh overall episode of the series . It originally aired on NBC in the United States on September 17 , 2009 . In the episode , Leslie accidentally takes a stand in favor of same @-@ sex marriage when she holds a marriage for two male penguins during a publicity stunt for the zoo .

The episode was written by Norm Hiscock and directed by Paul Feig . The writing staff sought to address more topical issues during the second season , and the same @-@ sex marriage plot was inspired by the real @-@ life pairing of Harry and Pepper , a pair of romantically involved male penguins at the San Francisco Zoo . However , Hiscock said he was focused more strongly on comedy than making a political or social statement .

" Pawnee Zoo " received generally positive reviews , with several commentators claiming it showed improvement and growth compared to the show 's first season , which received lukewarm reviews . According to Nielsen Media Research , " Pawnee Zoo " was watched by 5 million households . Among viewers aged between 18 and 49 , the episode was seen by 30 percent fewer viewers than the first season pilot episode . In March 2010 , " Pawnee Zoo " won the GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Individual Episode .

= = Plot = =

The episode opens with Ron (Nick Offerman) saying to Leslie (Amy Poehler) , " Here 's the situation ... " , prompting her to go into a full rendition of the rap " Parents Just Don 't Understand " . Afterward , he tells her someone is on fire at a park and needs immediate assistance . Later , Leslie holds a marriage for two recently acquired penguins to help promote the Pawnee Zoo . Immediately after the marriage , the two penguins begin having sex in front of a crowd of children , who are informed by an adult in the audience that both penguins are actually males . The Bulge , a gay bar in Pawnee , later sends Leslie a wedding cake with two penguins on top to thank her for supporting the gay community . April (Aubrey Plaza) introduces Leslie to her boyfriend Derek (Blake Lee) , who himself also has a boyfriend named Ben (Josh Duveneck) , much to Leslie 's confusion . They declare her their " hero " for holding the gay penguin wedding , but Leslie insists it was simply a publicity stunt , not a political statement . Nevertheless , Marcia Langman (Darlene Hunt) , a member of the Society for Family Stability Foundation , demands she annul the penguin wedding or resign from the parks department .

Ann (Rashida Jones) , who has been nursing Mark (Paul Schneider) at the hospital since he fell into the pit , says he has acted much nicer since the incident . Ann also reveals she has broken up with Andy (Chris Pratt) . Mark and Leslie kissed before he fell , but both insist they are just friends . Mark tries to ask Ann out , but she declines out of respect for Leslie 's friendship . Meanwhile , the Bulge holds a party in Leslie 's honor , which she attends along with Tom (Aziz Ansari) to announce she has not taken a political stand . However , she accepts the free drinks they offer her and ends up getting drunk and having a great time . The next day , she is invited to go on the Pawnee Today talk show to discuss her supposed stance on same @-@ sex marriage with Marcia Langman and television host Joan Callamezzo (Mo Collins) .

Meanwhile , Andy shows up at Ann 's house wearing a fancy suit . He tells her he has matured , gotten an office job and would like to get back together , but Ann declines . The camera follows Andy as he leaves , revealing he is actually living in a tent inside the pit . During the Pawnee Today show , Leslie and Marcia argue fiercely . Leslie insists she has not taken a political position , even after Marcia brings up the recent party at the Bulge . They take several callers , all of whom agree that Leslie should resign . Fed up , Leslie adamantly insists she will not resign , nor will she annul the penguin wedding . Later , she visits Ann and insists that Ann go on a date with Mark . The episode ends with Leslie driving the penguins from the Pawnee Zoo to a zoo in Iowa , where same @-@ sex marriage is legal .

= = Production = =

" Pawnee Zoo " was written by Norm Hiscock and directed by Paul Feig . It originally aired on NBC in the United States on September 17 , 2009 . It is the first episode to feature Chris Pratt in the title credits as a regular cast member rather than a guest star . The episode addressed the issue of same @-@ sex marriage , typically a controversial social topic for government officials . The staff of Parks and Recreation sought to address more topical issues with the second season episodes , and the writers discussed with series co @-@ creator Michael Schur possible topics for the season debut . They settled on same @-@ sex marriage , which was an issue of particularly high debate at the time , especially in the Los Angeles area . During that discussion , one of the writers brought up the real @-@ life pairing of Harry and Pepper , a pair of romantically involved male penguins at the San Francisco Zoo . The real @-@ life penguins had separated from each other shortly before the episode aired , which resulted in press coverage that the pair " broke up " .

Hiscock felt a gay penguin marriage was a good way to connect Leslie 's character and profession to the issue , since a zoo would be part of the parks department . He said , " It seemed like a funny starting place : a cute zoo promotion that spins out of control . " Although the storyline is comedic through its use of penguins in the same @-@ sex marriage , commentators inferred the episode nevertheless takes a position in favor of same @-@ sex marriage . Hiscock said in writing the script , he did not intend to make a strong political or social message , and that the staff was more focused on comedy and developing the Leslie Knope character . However , Hiscock said , " What I like is that Leslie doesn 't back down from her zoo promotion idea and refuses to annul the wedding . In a weird way she takes a stance . "

Within a week of the episode 's original broadcast , two deleted scenes from " Pawnee Zoo " were made available on the official Parks and Recreation website . In the first two @-@ and @-@ a @-@ half @-@ minute clip , Tom talks at the penguin wedding about the " penguin bachelor party " he threw for the birds . Later , Tom and April help prepare Leslie for the Pawnee Today show by impersonating the other guests and berating Leslie without giving her a chance to speak . In the second two @-@ minute clip , Andy gives a tour of his home in the pit , and Leslie changes around Ann 's apartment to change the feng shui after her breakup with Andy . Ann also gives Mark brownies to bring to Leslie , which he promptly starts to eat himself .

= = Cultural references = =

During the episode 's cold open , Leslie Performs the third verse of " Parents Just Don 't Understand " , a rap song by DJ Jazzy Jeff & The Fresh Prince , while Ron tries to tell her about an emergency by saying the song 's starting line , " Here 's the situation " . April presents a stylized stencil poster of Leslie designed in a similar way to the Barack Obama " Hope " poster designed by artist Shepard Fairey , with the word " Knope " instead of " Hope " . While introducing Leslie at a gay bar , April says Leslie is " here to recruit you " , quoting a line from gay rights activist Harvey Milk . At the bar , Leslie sings a karaoke cover of the 2008 Lady Gaga song , " Poker Face " . When Leslie insults Tom 's shirt , he defends it by claiming it was featured in the monthly men 's magazine , Details . When sarcastically asking if Langman wants her to commit harakari , Leslie accidentally says " harikari , " a common mispronunciation of the traditional Japanese cultural term .

= = Reception = =

In its original American broadcast on September 17 , 2009 , " Pawnee Zoo " was seen by 5 million households , according to Nielsen Media Research . The episode received a 2 @.@ 1 rating among viewers aged between 18 and 49 , a 30 percent drop in viewership compared to the first season pilot episode .

" Pawnee Zoo " received generally positive reviews . Time magazine writer James Poniewozik felt the episode " beautifully " merged the political and personal and improved upon previous episodes by using and balancing its supporting characters . Poniewozik added , " ' Pawnee Zoo ' was spot

@-@ on , and had me cracking up beginning to end . " Henning Fog of Entertainment Weekly said with " Pawnee Zoo " , the series appeared to be finding its rhythm and starting to distinguish itself from its conceptual spinoff , The Office , which was also created by Parks and Recreation co @-@ creator Greg Daniels . Fog also felt bringing real social issues into the show was a positive direction for the series . Emily Christianson of the Los Angeles Times said " Pawnee Zoo " improves upon the first season by giving more attention to plot points outside the pit . Christianson particularly enjoyed the scenes with Leslie drunk in the bar , and liked the introduction of the Ann and Mark romance . Los Angeles Times writer Jon Caramanica said the same @-@ sex marriage subplot only alters the show 's dynamic " a smidge " , and mainly serves as " another opportunity for misadventure for Leslie Knope " . Caramanica added Poehler is talented , but ill @-@ suited for the goofy Leslie character .

Maureen Ryan of the Chicago Tribune said the episode appeared to be heading in a better direction than the first season and , regarding Leslie , added " You start to root for her this season , instead of wishing she would go away . " She also praised the " Parent 's Just Don 't Understand " rap , comparing it to Poehler 's acclaimed rap about the @-@ vice presidential candidate Sarah Palin during a Saturday Night Live sketch . Matt Fowler of IGN said " Pawnee Zoo " was " more solidly entertaining " than the entire first season , and made a stronger effort to build up the supporting cast , particularly by establishing a romance between Jones and Schneider . Fowler particularly praised Pratt and voiced excitement for his new subplot . San Francisco Chronicle writer Tim Goodman , who was very critical of the Parks and Recreation first season , said " Pawnee Zoo " brought new life to the series . Goodman felt the Leslie character was less clueless and ditzy , and that same @-@ sex marriage was " perfect fodder " for the show . Steve Heisler of The A.V. Club commented the " Pawnee Zoo " plot was strong , the supporting cast performed well and that Poehler feels " a lot more comfortable in Knope 's skin . " But Heisler said it " isn 't the best thing on tonight . " Not all reviews were positive . Verne Gay of Newsday voiced admiration for Parks and Recreation , but found " Pawnee Zoo " to be " flat , forced and messagey " , and did not make proper use of the supporting cast . He gave the premiere episode a C + grade . Johnny Firecloud of CraveOnline praised Poehler and the " Parents Just Don 't Understand " opening , but felt cast members like Jones are wasted . He also said there is little chemistry between Jones and Schneider .

In March 2010 , " Pawnee Zoo " won the GLAAD Media Award for Outstanding Individual Episode (in a series without a regular LGBT character) . It was nominated alongside the ABC drama series Private Practice , the NBC supernatural drama The Listener and the CW drama / horror series Supernatural in the category .

= = DVD release = =

" Pawnee Zoo " , along with the other 23 second season episodes of Parks and Recreation , was released on a four @-@ disc DVD set in the United States on November 30 , 2010 . The DVD included deleted scenes for each episode .