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Barker lobbies on pet cause

On the day he taped his finale for 'The Price Is Right,' host pressed Assembly about a bill.

By Shane Goldmacher - Bee Capitol Bureau

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Bob Barker took time Wednesday to call members of the state Assembly to support a pet spay and neuter bill, which passed by one vote that day. Associated Press/ Damian Dovarganes

Legendary game show host Bob Barker taped his final episode of "The Price is Right" on Wednesday, celebrating 35 years as host of the show and 50 years on daytime television.

But that's not all Barker was up to that day.

The venerable TV host was working the phones, contacting the offices of wavering members of the state Assembly to urge them to support a bill that would require most pets to be spayed or neutered.

"I was calling as the vote got down near the wire," Barker said in an interview with The Bee. "I understood it was very close."

Close indeed.

Assembly Bill 1634, written by Assemblyman Lloyd Levine, D-Van Nuys, came up four votes short early in the morning but squeaked out of the Assembly by evening's end with 41 votes, barely a majority in the 80-member house. The bill now moves to the state Senate.

"I've called at least half a dozen offices," Barker said.

He squeezed those calls in between filming the final episode of "The Price is Right" in Los Angeles and hosting a news conference to discuss his retirement.

As loyal viewers of the TV game show know, the 83-year-old Barker is no Johnny-come-lately to the animal overpopulation issue.

In 1995, Barker established the DJ&T Foundation, named in memory of his wife, Dorothy Jo, and his mother, Matilda, whom people called Tilly. The foundation helps fund low-cost spay and neuter clinics.

"There are just too many cats and dogs being born," Barker said.

And at the end of the final episode of "The Price is Right," just as he has done for the past 20 years, Barker closed with a plea for pet sterilization: "Help control the pet population -- have your pets spayed or neutered. Goodbye, everybody."

Levine, who noted that more than 400,000 dogs and cats are euthanized every year in California at a cost of \$300 million, said he appreciated Barker's support for his bill.

"He believes in it," said Levine, whose AB 1634 would require most dog and cat owners to have their animals sterilized by the age of 4 months or face a \$500 fine.

"It is more than just a line in his TV show," he said. "The animals have a true friend in Bob Barker."

The pet sterilization legislation has inspired some of the most passionate public response of any proposed law in 2007.

Republican lawmakers have called the measure everything from unnecessary to overly invasive.

"We need to stop pulling bills out of the crazy bill factory," said Assemblyman George Plescia, R-La Jolla.

"This is nonsense," contended Assemblyman Bob Huff, R-Diamond Bar, during debate on the measure.

Besides Barker, numerous celebrities have lined up behind the measure, including Diane Keaton, Pierce

Brosnan, William Shatner, Ben Stein, Emmylou Harris and Katherine Heigl.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has not taken a position on the bill.

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