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A Law For Bad Humans

Don't listen to the naysayers -- the spay and neuter bill in Sacramento is worth passing

HONESTLY, PEOPLE. Here it is, the day after Independence Day, and some "independent" citizens you all are, still expecting someone else to clean up after you.

There are all kinds of public messes — from leaving it to the schools to discipline your kids, to trashing the public landscape. (Last week, a driver in front of me at a red light tossed his fast-food empties out of his car. If I'd had time to scoop it up and dump it back in his window, he'd probably have shot me, and the headline would have read: "Columnist trashed one last time.")

This time, I mean the animal messes. Not the ones you let your pets leave on the sidewalk, but the criminal mess of pets you allow to be neglected and killed.

Not every Californian trashes the highways; not every Californian is callous to animals. But enough of you are that half a million unwanted, homeless cats and dogs get put to death by California's city and county shelters every year. Just about one life every minute.

I'm one of those who cleans up your messes. Every dog I've rescued and found a home for is one you flicked aside like an empty Arrowhead bottle.

Dogs like Oliver, eating garbage outside the market. Penelope, pushed out of a car on a freeway. Bob and Osgood and Annabelle and Hattie and Lucy and Woodrow and blind Berkeley and all the dozens of others, left to starve or become road kill. Like many other freelance animal lovers, I've spent hundreds of hours and thousands of bucks saving dogs and finding them good homes.

I'm tired of cleaning up after you. California is tired too; its cities and counties have no room or money to keep all the homeless kittens and puppies, all the old dogs and cats you allow to overbreed or leave out on the street like an old refrigerator. And so they have to kill them.

Who cares? You should. You, the California taxpayer, shell out a quarter of a billion dollars a year for this.

And because you won't tidy up your messes, other people have to do it for you. Like Lloyd Levine, the Van Nuys Democratic assemblyman whose proposed California Healthy Pets Act could save millions of dollars and thousands of creatures.

The bill requires California dogs and cats 6 months and older to be spayed or neutered. If you get caught with "unfixed" animals, the \$500 fine can be refunded once you do the right thing; the fine comes with a guide to cheap spaying and neutering. If you want to breed your pet, you can buy a permit that allows one litter a year.

The objections to Levine's bill run from the selfish to the ridiculous.

The American Kennel Club has threatened to pull its annual Long Beach dog show over this, even though purebred show animals and licensed breeders' animals would be exempt from the law, as are police dogs, rescue dogs and therapy and guide dogs.

The bill's opponents yammer that it's animal social engineering, socialism, mutt genocide (around my house, please remember to say "multicultural canines") and anti-business — and therefore un-American.

There's one business the bill is anti: illegal, underground animal breeding — all those backyard puppy mills churning out defective Dalmatians or border collies or whatever purse-sized dog happens to be hot. My vet took in an abandoned puppy-mill Chihuahua — Scooter, born without front legs because of overbreeding.

Want to ruin your own life? Perfectly fine by me. Heroin? Live it up, baby — just don't break into my house to pay for your habit. Ride your hog without a helmet? Go for it — unless your smashup means my taxes pay to support you for the rest of your comatose life. Same goes for critters. When thousands of them have to die for humans' irresponsible choices, playtime's over.

Yet even some animal lobbies are fighting Levine's bill, because it's either too much or not enough. But you don't kill a good bill because it isn't a perfect bill.

Some point out that Levine's AB 1634 doesn't address pet smuggling. But if the federal government can't halt illegal immigration, a California law can hardly stop the flow of contraband Chihuahuas. The bill also doesn't stop people from dumping their sick pets at shelters because they can't afford treatment. These are matters for another bill and another session; AB 1634 doesn't have to do everything to accomplish something.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I have to do what I do every July 5: look for terrified dogs who broke loose and ran away because of the noise from illegal gunfire and illegal fireworks shot off by you boneheads. Someone's got to stop them from becoming road kill — just as Sacramento should do for Levine's bill.