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Spay-neuter bill to be revived

By LARRY MITCHELL - Staff Writer

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A hotly debated bill requiring most dogs and cats to be spayed or neutered will be on the table again, probably in April.

Tracy Hon of Chico, who rescues boxers, said she's eager for the bill's next shot at becoming law.

Something has to be done about the costly problem of pet overpopulation, she said.

She feels it directly. She gets four or five inquiries a week from people who want to give up boxers, she said. They're from around California and sometimes from other states, too.

When she has room at her kennel, Canine Retreat, north of town, she'll take a boxer. But right now she has several rescued dogs and is finding it difficult to place them in homes, she said. "Everyone wants a puppy."

Assemblyman Lloyd Levine, D-Van Nuys, found himself embroiled in a huge fight last year after he introduced Assembly Bill 1634.

It was supported by many animal-rescue groups, Humane Societies and cities and opposed by a long list of dog clubs and breeders' groups. According to an analysis on the state Assembly Web page, letters and petitions were received from about 10,000 people favoring the bill and about an equal number opposing it.

The legislation passed two Assembly committees and then the full Assembly, by a vote of 41 to 38. Assemblymen Rick Keene, R-Chico, and Doug

LaMalfa, R-Richvale, both voted against the bill.

In the Senate, the measure went first to the Committee on Local Government. There, Levine realized he didn't have enough support to get the measure passed, so he withdrew it, stated Alex Traverso, the legislator's press secretary, in an e-mail.

The bill will return to that committee for a vote, probably in April, he wrote. "We've made AB1634 a two-year bill and are using the extra time to address the concerns of the committee members and hopefully come back with a strong piece of legislation that will garner the necessary support."

According to a press release from Levine's office, AB1634 would require most dogs and cats to be spayed or neutered, but would allow more than 20 types of exemptions, including for show and sporting dogs; law-enforcement dogs; search-and-rescue dogs; guide, service and signal animals; and pets that are too old or in poor health.

"The facts of this issue are really very simple," stated animal activist Judie Mancuso, a sponsor of the bill, in the release. "The needless killing of over 500,000 healthy animals and the waste of hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars each year must end."

Hon said she went to Sacramento twice last year to testify in favor of the bill. She saw how intensely the measure was debated, both in the hearing room and among those waiting for a chance to speak.

"It got pretty vicious out in the hallway," she said.

The pet population problem is the result of human irresponsibility, she said. Too often, people don't think through the decision to get a pet.

"We are a throwaway society. When something

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doesn't work, you throw it away and buy a new one," she said, adding that way of thinking affects dogs and cats.

Staff writer Larry Mitchell can be reached at 896-7759 or lmitchell@chicoer.com.

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