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TOP NEWS AND OPINION



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My Dog Has No Balls

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My dog has no balls.

And I'm proud of it.

That's not to say he isn't brave (he guards his house like the best of them) or handsome or virile or protective. He just has no balls because he doesn't need them. They were removed when I had him neutered after rescuing him from the Los Angeles South Central Shelter when he was six months old.

Having a pet spayed or neutered actually extends its lifespan by a few years and reduces any aggressive traits or tendencies. It also greatly cuts down on over-populations in cats and dogs, so that more and more pets remain in loving and responsible homes, and fewer are turned into one of this country's six thousand local shelters where an estimated four million animals are needlessly executed each year.

What a way to treat man's so-called "best friend." Six to eight million dogs and cats are deposited in United States shelters annually because of over-population or, pathetically, lack of interest. Only half of those find new adoptive home, with only thirty percent of shelter dogs reclaimed by owners. During the holidays, consumers buzzing with Christmas spirit buy puppies out of pet shop windows without realizing just how exhausting housetraining can be, or without having thought through how big that Saint Bernard puppy will grow to be one day. Or worse, once the puppy has grown out of its cute and adorable stage and needs attention, exercise and bathroom breaks, some new owners just decide their new "toy" is too time-consuming, and choose to dump the animal at the pound. April tends to be the month with the heaviest turn-in ratio. The cruelest and most cutting moment comes when an animal watches its owner walk away after dropping it off at what most likely will be the last stop in its sad life -- its face questioning the reason for the abandonment, questions that will never be answered.

So you're thinking, "I don't have a pet, I'm not part of the problem," or "I treat my Irish Setter like family, this doesn't affect me," -- unless, of course, you're Mitt Romney, the next president of the United States of Dog Diarrhea -- but it does, because you're already deeply involved in the problem. In California alone, taxpayers foot the bill for the nearly \$300 million annual cost to house and euthanize these animals. They generally suffer deplorable conditions and lonely existences. And the numbers are not declining, even with educational efforts and low-cost spay-neuter programs.

Which is why it is time to solve this country's pet over-population problem once and for all. The solution comes in the form of legislation, such as a bill currently making its way through the

California legal system. AB1634, the California Healthy Pets Act, proposes to require most people to spay or neuter their pets by the age of six months. Owners who do not comply under the proposed law will be fined accordingly. Animal control authorities will be responsible for overseeing effective enforcement of the bill, which is not that far of a stretch from what's currently in place, as one can rarely receive an unfixed dog from a city shelter or rescue group -- after all why create a problem from one that's been resolved?

When first proposed, the bill raised the hackles of pure-bred dog breeders, thinking the state had in mind some all-seeing Orwellian eye that would threaten their livelihood and eliminate their rights to continue breeding their lineages. In fact, they are coming to realize they have nothing by which to be concerned. Exempt from the bill are legal registered breeders who obtain a permit, law enforcement dogs, show dogs, dogs whose health would be threatened by spay or neutering, as well as service and guide dogs.

Those the bill does target are the so called, "backyard breeders," people who churn out dogs in inhumane ways, whose dogs have tons of puppies because the owners are too lazy to have them fixed, or because they wish to sell them without obtaining a license or paying taxes. People who have no room or yard or means to take care of their animals, and in turn so neglect them that they either become threats to society, or worse, clog the city shelters after abandonment.

And then there's this. There are people who feel neutering a male dog is akin to defacing it, and some male owners just seem to have some strange and pathetic testicular infatuation with their dog's manhood -- or as I like to call it, Ball Infatuation. To those I say, "Gentlemen, measure your own worth by your own, well, you know, not your dog's."

Opposition to bills such as AB1634 seems inane to me, but that's probably because I spend time visiting these overrun shelters, and because I cannot for the life of me see an end in sight to this miserable debacle without passage of like bills. And also because I countless nights awake thinking of the millions of deserving dogs like the love of my life Hudson the dog, who spend their nights alone and scared and so undeserving of their own cruel fates.

It's about time man and woman became the best friend these dogs deserve. Get some balls, if you will, and support propositions such as AB1634, the California Healthy Pets Act. And in the words of the great Bob Barker, have your pets spayed or neutered.