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Come on down....to help the animals

Support AB 1634, the California Healthy Pets Act

By Bob Barker

For 35 wonderful years, I've had the great pleasure of hosting The Price is Right. As many of you know, I've ended every show with a plea for our animal friends: "Help control the pet population. Have your pet spayed or neutered."

I'm retiring from the Price is Right at the end of its 35th year, but I'll never retire from helping animals.

I could not imagine my life without the many animals that have been a part of my family over the years.

Right now, there's a terrible problem in California - over 800,000 dogs and cats end up in shelters every year. Worse yet, there are no homes for 400,000 of them and they are euthanized. The cause is simple: people are not spaying and neutering their pets which adds to this crisis year after year. There are just too many dogs and cats born every single day to possibly find enough homes for them.

Fortunately, there's a reasonable, common sense solution to this tragedy. This spring, the legislature is considering the California Healthy Pets Act, AB 1634, that would create a universal spay/neuter program for our state.

If pet owners spayed or neutered their dogs and cats, we could dramatically reduce the number of animals who cannot be placed in a loving home and are put to death. This sad situation does not just impact animals and the people who love them -- as taxpayers, we pay \$250 million every year to shelter and euthanize animals.

California's current answer to pet population -- simply hoping that everyone will care enough to have their pet spayed or neutered-- hasn't worked.

I founded an organization in 1994 that provides millions of dollars to fund low-cost or free spay/neuter programs across the nation. The fact that free and low-cost spay/neuter services are available has helped, but it isn't enough. A universal spay/neuter law will provide the incentive that some people need to get their pets spayed or neutered.

We know that universal spay/neuter laws get results because they are working in other states across the country. In 2006, Rhode Island passed a spay/neuter law that

has been hailed as a success in reducing the number of animals entering the state's shelters. Also, Massachusetts has seen a drastic reduction in the number of homeless animals due to aggressive spay/neuter programs. In California, universal spay/neuter laws have been implemented in nine areas from Stanislaus to San Bernardino. Santa Cruz County cut its animal shelter population in half after it passed a universal spay/neuter law.

Of course, the California Healthy Pets Act provides certain exemptions for purebred, show, search and rescue, police K-9, and other service animals.

In a perfect world, pet owners would do the right thing and spay/neuter their pets. But the heartbreaking reality is that we have more loveable animals in our shelters than there are loving homes. Clearly, adoption is only a small part of the never ending struggle to deal with so many homeless pets. **Prevention through spay/neuter is the only absolute solution.**

The California Healthy Pets Act is a reasonable and humane answer to pet overpopulation. An added bonus is that it would save taxpayers millions of dollars now spent on sheltering abandoned animals. You might even say that the price is right on this piece of legislation.

I urge the legislature to pass AB 1634. This important bill will save the lives of hundreds of thousands of dogs and cats every year, and, of course, prevent a great deal of suffering. This is not partisan legislation. It is the humane, civilized thing to do. Immediately, call, write or e-mail your state Assemblymember, Senator, and Governor Schwarzenegger and ask them to vote YES on AB 1634, the California Healthy Pets Act.

Bob Barker is the host of the television show The Price is Right, and the founder of the DJ&F Foundation which provides grant funding to organizations that subsidize low-cost and free spay/neuter services.