

## From The Archives of the No Kill Blog

Friday, August 15, 2008

### [The Judge, Jury, & Executioners Behind AB 1634](#)

At a recent California State Senate hearing on AB 1634, the bill that started out as [mandatory spay/neuter law but has since devolved and been amended into oblivion](#), a Senator asked Ed Boks, the General Manager of Los Angeles Animal Services (LAAS) and one of the bill's chief proponents: "Mr. Boks, this bill doesn't even pretend to be about saving animals, does it?"

To which Boks responded: "No Senator, this is not about saving dogs and cats."

Ed Boks should know. Since passage of his local version of AB 1634, [impounds and killing have skyrocketed at the Los Angeles pound he oversees](#), exactly as concerned animal lovers feared. In fact, the increased killing was the first at LAAS in over a decade.

As seen time and time again, mandatory sterilization laws are largely a distraction, increasing the power of animal control to impound and kill yet more animals, while they divert resources from programs that do work so that agencies can hire yet more officers to write yet more tickets and impound more animals—or threaten to do so—to no avail. So if it is not about saving dogs and cats, what is it about?

While some supporters desperately want to believe that mandatory sterilization laws are about saving lives, the facts tragically (in Los Angeles and elsewhere) have proved otherwise. And while people are free to believe whatever they want in a democracy, simply believing something doesn't necessarily make it so, and never will. Meanwhile, animals continue to be killed in appalling numbers and reform efforts are squandered on an agenda that has no hope of achieving success. Moreover, the animals are paying the ultimate price for the false beliefs of animal activists. They are the ones being slaughtered *en masse* because of it. With animals being killed every day in California shelters because shelter leadership has not embraced the lifesaving culture of the No Kill philosophy and the comprehensive programs and services which make it possible, activists must move beyond the empty hope that mandatory spay/neuter will ever be anything but a failure.

But the motivation for shelter directors who are mired in killing is entirely different. Since "this is not about saving dogs and cats," what is it about? It is about taking the pressure off of their own failures. As the chorus of voices about the killing in California shelters and their own inability or unwillingness to do anything substantive about it grows, so do their attempts to divert attention elsewhere. For a diversion to work, you need someone to blame. And blame needs a boogeyman to be effective. The boogeyman here is that the shelter is merely doing the dirty work of an "irresponsible public" and all those who stand in their way are labeled animal haters.

This approach takes its cues from Karl Rove's post 9/11 three-step strategy:

1. Invoke 9/11
2. Do whatever you want
3. Silence concerned critics by claiming they don't care about protecting Americans

The proponents of AB 1634 have tried to sell it in much the same way:

1. Invoke ~~9/11~~ pet overpopulation
2. Do whatever you want
3. Silence concerned critics by claiming they don't care about protecting ~~Americans~~ animals

The motivation of shelter directors notwithstanding, what's in it for others? Once again, if it is not about saving lives, what is it about?

I believe it is about darker impulses. These are the people who obstinately ignore facts, experience, and history and continue to push these types of laws. They will do what they have always done—facts, logic, and history be damned. They will continue to blame the public and they will continue to fight for more and tougher laws. They will argue that their community is different, that their situation is unique, that citizens in their community are particularly—or peculiarly—irresponsible. None of this is true, but they do not care. They will ignore the failures of dysfunctional animal control shelters and its equally inept and uncaring leadership. They will ignore that many shelter directors find killing easier than doing what is necessary to stop it and so kill rather than take advantage of readily available lifesaving alternatives to killing. They will stand side-by-side with these perpetrators.

While they claim to be motivated by saving lives, there is something much more powerful driving them: *the desire to punish*. An activist truly focused on lifesaving, who subsequently learns that punitive legislation is not only a dismal failure, but that it has the opposite results (more impounds, more killing), would end their support of such methods and begin to push for more compassionate leadership at animal control or the programs and services of [the No Kill Equation](#).

By contrast, those who are intent on punishing the public are being driven by other imperatives. In the end, they so want to punish the public for not taking care of their pets as much as they think they should, they are willing to ignore all the evidence about legislation's true results or about how to truly save lives, and instead empower animal control to kill animals in the process. Unfortunately, animal control is generally more than willing to oblige and do just that. Their motto: if we deem you irresponsible, we have the power to kill your pet. In the end, these activists become that which they claim to most despise—people whose actions result in the impound and killing of animals. They become the “irresponsible public.”

But regardless of underlying beliefs and motivations, the end game is the same: power to kill increases and animals die. That is why true animal lovers should dedicate themselves to restricting the state's killing apparatus, reducing the power of the pounds to involuntarily (or under the threat of citation) take in—and potentially kill—animals when those animals are not being neglected or subject to cruelty. They should not seek to increase that power at the expense of the lives of animals.