

Veterinary Students as Animal Advocates

As veterinary students, our focus is our studies. However, some students also make time to get involved in animal advocacy work that will improve the welfare of companion, farmed or other species of animals in our communities. Currently, California is addressing two significant animal welfare-related political issues. The first is the California Prevention of Farm Animal Cruelty Act, a first-of-its-kind ballot initiative launched by the Humane Society of The United States. This Act would prohibit the use of veal crates, gestation crates and battery cages throughout the state of California. Volunteers all over the state, including veterinarians and veterinary students, are gathering signatures from registered California voters with a goal to obtain 650,000 signatures by the end of February 2008. If enough signatures are collected, the initiative will be placed on the November 2008 ballot in California, giving voters a chance to approve this landmark initiative.

At UC Davis, veterinary student Sarah Mathews is working hard to educate others about this groundbreaking ballot initiative. She is asking veterinary students to endorse it as well as working to gather signatures of support. She also helped plan a student talk in January with representatives both opposing and supporting the initiative. In southern California, at Western University of Health Sciences, second-year veterinary student Vanessa Rizzo is also volunteering her time to collect signatures and coordinated a similar panel discussion on the initiative. Veterinary students in California who would like to endorse or volunteer for this initiative can go to www.humanecalifornia.org for more information.

The second California initiative is the California Healthy Pets Act (AB 1634), a bill that would require spaying and neutering of dogs and cats over 6 months of age in the state of California, unless otherwise exempt. Both Briana Mirchel, a third-year veterinary student, and myself are currently working to promote this bill. We invited Judie Mancuso, the campaign director for AB 1634, to speak at our school in November and gathered signatures of support from students and faculty. We recently met with our local state



Western University veterinary student Vanessa Rizzo has been helping collect signatures for a California ballot initiative to improve living conditions for farmed animals.

Senator, Senator Gloria Negrete McLeod, to discuss the bill and ask for her support as well as spoke on a public television show, Doggy TV, about the importance of spaying and neutering and the pet overpopulation crisis in California and throughout the United

States. We are currently working to get more veterinarians involved in the bill. For more information, visit www.cahealthypets.com or www.vetsforab1634.com.

As future veterinarians, it is imperative that we get involved in crucial animal issues. The public views veterinarians as experts in animal care and welfare, and they will listen to what we have to say. Veterinarians are not generally known for speaking out for the animals and getting involved in political issues; however the time has come for that to change. And it begins with us, the veterinary students. We don't have to wait until we graduate to help, we can start now. I urge all of you to get active in animal-related politics in some way.

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HSVMA Continues Presentations at Veterinary Schools, Participates in SAVMA 2008

The new Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association (HSVMA) will continue to host presentations at veterinary schools on a variety of animal welfare and animal rights topics during the winter and spring semesters. AVAR veterinary members presented at a dozen veterinary schools during the fall semester, and veterinary presentations will continue during the spring semester under the auspices of HSVMA.

Topics covered in presentations include Early-Age Sterilization, Cosmetic and Convenience Surgeries, Farmed Animal Welfare, Practicing Veterinary Medicine from an Animal Welfare/Animal Rights Perspective, Genetic Disorders in Purebred Dogs, and Assisting in Animal Cruelty Investigations.

HSVMA also will be hosting a booth at the Student American Veterinary Medical Association (SAVMA) Symposium. This



Holly Cheever, DVM, speaks to veterinary students at Virginia Tech/University of Maryland College of Veterinary Medicine.

year's symposium is being hosted jointly by Tuskegee University College of Veterinary Medicine and Auburn University College of Veterinary Medicine, both in Alabama, March 19-23, 2008. HSVMA will sponsor two speakers: Dr. Kelly Farrell on the subject of early-sterilization, and Dr. Ben Kitchen on alternatives in veterinary medical education.