

PARTING SHOT FROM EDWARD STRATTON

A weekly snapshot from The Daily Astorian and Chinook Observer photographers



Smokey Bear made an appearance in Melanie Williams' first-grade class at John Jacob Astor Elementary School in Astoria in May.

ODDITY*For cats, a right to bear claws*

New York could ban declawing of cats

By DAVID KLEPPER
Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — New York would be the first state to ban the declawing of cats under a legislative proposal that has divided veterinarians.

Several vets along with a spokescat named Rubio came to the state Capitol this week to lobby for the ban. They say the declawing procedure, which involves cutting through bone, tendon and nerves to amputate the first segment of a cat's toes, is unnecessary and cruel. Australia, Britain and several European countries already ban the practice. It's also illegal in Los Angeles and some other California cities.

"It's a disfiguring, inhumane and misguided procedure," said Eileen Jefferson, an Ulster County veterinarian who does not perform the procedure. She said about 25 percent of cats will be declawed.

Rubio, a spokescat

While Jefferson and the other vets discussed the bill at a press conference in the Capitol, Rubio roamed the room, sniffing the reporters and occasionally offering a meow as greeting. The 11-year-old Abyssinian has his claws but chose not to use them on the journalists.

The state's Veterinary Medical Society opposes the legislation, saying the surgical procedure can often save cats with

destructive scratching behavior from being euthanized. In a memo of opposition, the society argues that declawing is a decision best left to cat owners and veterinarians and not lawmakers.

"It is the veterinarian's obligation to provide cat owners a complete education with regard to normal scratching behavior of cats, the procedure itself, and potential risks to the patient," the society's memo reads. "Declawing of domestic cats should be considered only after attempts have been made to prevent the cat from using its claws destructively."

Like amputation

The bill is before both the Senate and Assembly, but no vote has been scheduled. Assembly sponsor Linda Rosenthal, a Manhattan Democrat, says support is growing as more cat owners learn the details of the procedure. Unlike clipping nails in a human, or even removing the entire fingernail, declawing a cat involves amputating the first segment of each toe on each paw.

Supporters of the ban say destructive clawing can often be dealt with through nail clipping, nail caps or scratching posts. And the vets lobbying for the legislation on Tuesday said that declawing a cat can often lead to worse behavior problems, including difficulty using a litter box or biting something disputed by the veterinary society.

"In most cases declawing is performed as a convenience to the owner," Rosenthal said. "I've heard so many times: 'I have expensive furniture! I have nice drapes! If your standard is 'I need pristine furniture,' don't get a cat.'"



AP Photo/Mike Groll

A cat named Rubio walks in front of the podium during a news conference on Tuesday in Albany, N.Y. New York would be the first state to ban declawing under a legislative proposal that has divided veterinarians.

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