Understanding the Difference Between *Animal Rights* and *Animal Welfare*

In every election, the American Kennel Club (AKC) sees a fair number of candidates who appear to support the human-animal connection, kindness to animals, and proper care of animals based on sound science, but instead use the term "animal rights" and even express outright support for "animal rights".

Policymakers know *semantics matter*. Every policymaker and their advisers should take the time to acquaint themselves with the difference between *animal rights* and *animal welfare*. For responsible policy, and the future wellbeing of animals, this distinction is simply too important to get wrong. Consider the following:

Animal Rights *is a radical philosophy that posits that humans should not use or own animals in any way, even as companions, and seeks to ultimately make that grim agenda a reality.* For animal rights groups, the ultimate goal is not to improve the wellbeing of animals, but to stop breeding and human interaction with animals. Animal rights groups typically utilize media and legislation to incrementally change perceptions about the human use of animals, and to advance the goal of ending animal use and ownership.

The most radical animal rights groups advocate violence to achieve this goal. The federal government recognizes such activities as animal terrorism. The federal Animal Enterprise Terrorism Act (AETA) (18 U.S.C. § 43), outlaws activities for the purpose of damaging or interfering with the operations of an animal enterprise (including educational, agricultural, breeding, and other activities) and cause damage or loss of real or personal property, or places a person in reasonable fear of injury.

Animal Welfare *is pro-animal ownership. It recognizes the human-animal bond, recognizes the value of quality animal care and purposeful breeding, and supports advancing science to ensure the health and wellbeing of animals.*

Animal Welfare supports the practical and legal concept of animal ownership. In practice, owners love their animals, share their lives with them, and want to provide the best possible care for them. Legal "owners" of animals are responsible for their care and we have the right to make appropriate care decisions for them.

Animal Welfare is pro-animal ownership. It recognizes the human-animal bond, recognizes the value of quality animal care and purposeful breeding, and supports advancing science to ensure the health and wellbeing of animals.

Reasonable laws recognize that wellbeing of an animal is not tied to the number of animals a person has, but rather the quality of conditions and care provided. There are excellent owners of kennels of 100; and substandard owners of a single dog.

It's common for animal rights activists in the U.S. to advocate for closing down U.S. dog breeders, and replace them by restricting the sourcing of pets to random or unknown sources (often mislabeled as "rescues" or rescue distributors). The AKC strongly supports responsible rescue, and recognizes the appeal of assisting dogs from unknown origins, particularly overseas. However, putting regulated U.S. breeders out of business in favor of animals from undocumented sources with unknown health and temperament histories has the potential to create enormous public health risks, reduce overall oversight of canine health and welfare, weaken consumer protections available for purpose-bred dogs, and undermine breeders who provide purpose-bred dogs that play an unparalleled role in protecting national security from threats at home and overseas.

At the American Kennel Club, we love all dogs. AKC is dedicated to ensuring the health and wellbeing of all dogs and to preserving each unique breed. Breeds of dogs, each developed for a purpose, reflect the cultures and peoples who developed them and serve as a testament to our ongoing relationship. Our beautiful purebred dogs are constant reminder of the special connection between humans and their dogs — a relationship that predates recorded history—and shows that by working together, even across species, we all benefit.

akc.org/government-relations

Adapted from the American Kennel Club's *In Session Congressional Newsletter:*
http://cdn.akc.org/Government_Relations/In_Session_Draft_for_review_2.pdf