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All that is necessary for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing. Edmund Burke

July 12, 2010

Council President Eric Garcetti
and All Members
Los Angeles City Council
200 N. Spring Street
Los Angeles CA 90012

PROTEST

Honorable Council:

CF 10-1087 – APPOINTMENT OF BRENDA BARNETTE AS LOS ANGELES ANIMAL SERVICES GENERAL MANAGER

On July 13, 2010, the City Council will interview Ms. Brenda Barnette, who was appointed by Mayor Villaraigosa on June 17. We all hope that Ms. Barnette will succeed in this position--for the welfare of the animals, the residents of Los Angeles, and, especially for the safety and morale of the LAAS employees, who have been subjected to constant turmoil through numerous management changes.

There are several issues which I believe are of concern and Ms. Barnette should be encouraged to discuss at the confirmation hearing:

1. How she plans to address the very serious responsibility of enforcing local and state laws, since her resume indicates she has absolutely NO training or experience in this area of animal control and public safety.

2. One of the key issues that has resulted in less-than-satisfactory performance by each of the non-City managers appointed to this position has been the lack of knowledge and/or consideration of governmental—and L.A. City—rules and regulations. Since Ms. Barnette appears to have NEVER worked for a large municipal agency nor have experience with labor union protections, how will she assure that she is in compliance before instituting any plans/programs for LA Animal Services?

3. How does Ms. Barnette feel her long involvement with breeding organizations, including the AKC, will influence her as head of a public sheltering system with a strict citywide spay/neuter ordinance and which has many purebred animals relinquished to it annually?

4. There are major philosophic, pragmatic and operational differences between a small humane society which focuses on adoption and a large public animal-care/control and public safety agency. How will Ms. Barnette withstand and NOT submit to pressures to "change" long-standing policies and City ordinances that are bringing desired results and are vital to ensure safety to both animals and the public, WHETHER OR NOT they are popular?

Sincerely,

Phyllis M. Daugherty, Director

Attach. – Article (www.opposingviews.com/i/villaraigosa-akc-rep-brenda-barnette-new-l-a-animal-services-top-dog)

http://www.opposingviews.com/ laraigosa-akc-rep-brenda-barnette w-l-a-animal-services-top-dog

Villaraigosa: AKC Rep Brenda Barnette New L.A. Animal Services Top Dog

Opinion by Phyllis M Daugherty
(11 Hours Ago) in Politics

After a year-long, nationwide search he called the most intensive he's ever seen, Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa announced on June 17, 2010, that Brenda Barnette, CEO of the Seattle Humane Society, is most qualified to make the City's policy decisions regarding the lives and welfare of the dogs and cats living in Los Angeles and how they will affect residents.

Barnette's other job in Seattle is Legislative Representative for the American Kennel Club (AKC), which she stated at the media conference, amounts to merely hitting the "forward key" when the world's largest purebred dog-breeding registry sends her information on issues to oppose or support.

Wow, that caused a collective gasp by the small group of invitation-only spay/neuter advocates present, most of whom were longtime animal devotees who celebrated with Lakers-style cheers and tears in 2008 when Councilman Richard Alarcon spearheaded, and the City Council passed, what is termed the toughest spay/neuter ordinance in the country. At a recent news event at the West LA shelter, "CA SPAY" license plate availability was announced, a concept introduced in Sacramento by Los Angeles-area Senator Alex Padilla. These plates are adorned with the artwork of celebrity heartthrob Pierce Brosnan, which should make any female with even residual hormones willing to pay $50 extra to a statewide spay/neuter fund for an on-the-road reminder that spaying or neutering stops the breeding which results in companion pet overpopulation and euthanasia.

The timing and animal-shelter venue selected for the Mayor's media event regarding Barnette could be termed insensitive, if not intentionally torturous, for employees and others present, as a handful of animal-shelter-worker union reps and labor leaders held up bright pink papers reminding the Mayor that at the same moment he announced Barnette's appointment to her $170,000/year (plus benefits) gig, the Personnel Department was handing layoff notices to 14 Animal Services employees, including eight license canvassers who stretch a meager $35,000 a year salary to feed families and pay rent. This is not out of character for Villaraigosa, who a few months ago held a high-dollar, catered pre-Oscar party in his taxpayer-provided estate while employees begged for their jobs outside.

In a June 18 article ,"Mayor nominates outsider to run L.A. Animal Services," L.A. Daily News reporter Rick Orlov quotes the Mayor proclaiming, "Barnette has one of the nation's strongest portfolios in animal shelter management, effective pet adoption and public education." http://www.dailynews.com/ci_15321017?IADID

So, let's explore what, other than her long AKC affiliation, set Barnett apart and what elevated her above a reported 120 other candidates with municipal and/or private animal sheltering and varied management experience. We need to recall that the Mayor hired an expensive Northern California search firm to aid his staff in compiling the "desired qualifications," but, ultimately, the only mandated requirement for the GM position was a valid CA driver's license, something Ms. Barnette undoubtedly intends to address soon. http://ourla.org/city-wide/1661-denise-a-justin-la-animal-services-gm-search-highlights-political-mismanagement

The 2008-2009 Annual Report for the Seattle Humane Society states that a total of 5,979 dogs and cats were admitted for the entire year (less than L.A.'s smallest San Pedro shelter) and 4,652 were placed. A notation alerts us that over 3,000 animals were placed in foster situations and some may still be awaiting homes. This is a limited-entry facility (SHS calls it "adoption guaranteed") which can selectively accept relinquished pets and which takes in a few strays from several small cities. Such agencies traditionally avoid impounding potentially or obviously sick animals to control spread of contagious diseases and medical expenses.

By contrast, the six new or recently expanded Los Angeles City animal care centers took in 54,110 unwanted, stray, abandoned, sick, ill and injured dogs and cats last year. Of these, they returned-to-owner or re-homed 31,750--one of the best statistics in the nation for an open-entry municipal shelter (which means "no animal turned away"). This "save rate" is especially commendable considering that many of the animals have demonstrated unsafe, aggressive behaviors before or after entering the shelter, which makes adopting them to a new owner inadvisable, or they have serious or terminal physical challenges that cannot be remedied.

When asked by a reporter at the press conference how she plans to improve adoption rates in Los Angeles, Brenda Barnette answered that she had only about 1,000,000 people in Seattle to be involved with fostering and other programs, and there are 4,000,000 in Los Angeles; therefore, more people will be available to help. She seemed to miss the point that those 4,000,000 people dumped almost 55,000 pets last year. When pressed for more details, she didn't offer any.

As he prepares to hand over one of the world's largest public animal care and control systems and a vital Los Angeles public-safety agency to someone whose work history shows only experience in donation-based nonprofit organizations and who has no governmental-budget or municipal-shelter management experience, perhaps the Mayor should look at some of the areas where Ms. Barnette seems to have run into some snags before.

A 9/25/09 *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* article entitled, "Humane Society says it can pick up slack in animal control – but how?," quotes Ms. Barnette declaring: "The Seattle Humane Society is absolutely committed to taking care of the animals in King County," Chief Executive Brenda Barnette said in a statement. "Our board, our staff and our volunteers are dedicated to this." However, the *Post* continues, "Barnette struck a much less optimistic tone last month, when she told reporter Chris Grygiel there is "no way" the agency could take care of an additional 10,000 animals a year in operations that could cost $5 million annually. "We just couldn't do it," she told Grygiel."
http://blog.seattlepi.com/seattlepolitics/archives/180288.asp

In an update, Barnette indicated that, in response to the possible closure of the King County Animal Care and Control shelter, "... the Seattle Humane Society shelter can double its dog capacity overnight by not offering boarding care services. Plans have also been drawn to bring in portable units to handle significantly more cats." However, she added, "I do have one huge concern...Executive Triplett mentioned stray hold as part of the animal control component. We are not amicable to receiving dogs (or other animals) after KCAC has held them for 3 days, due to disease control and unnecessary stress on the animals." http://blog.seattlepi.com/seattlepolitics/archives/180288.asp

Apparently in making her initial offer Ms. Barnette was not experienced enough to realize that disease control and stress are, unfortunately, the norm for every large municipal shelter, whether the General Manager is amicable or not. At its confirmation hearings, the Los Angeles City Council must make sure Ms. Barnette is fully aware that L.A. Animal Services is mandated to pick up and hold strays for owner redemption and to protect public health and safety. Many of these animals are, or become, ill and spread disease. However, in contrast to a private humane society, they cannot be turned away for that reason.

L.A. Animal Services also provides law enforcement, cruelty/neglect investigations, and emergency response to animals during major fires and other disasters. These are critical areas of expertise which Ms. Barnette's may also lack. This is a serious concern, because in order to gain the support and trust of employees who are often at risk, the head of the Department must be competent to make quick, experienced decisions in life-threatening situations for officer, animals and public safety.

On September 17, 2009, there was another indication that Ms. Barnette lacks basic familiarity with legal mandates regarding animal-health issues. A Bakersfield TV news broadcast, "Controversy Over Kern County Dogs Transferred to Seattle Arises," reported that volunteers had driven a total of 188 small dogs to the Seattle Humane Society in WA without vaccinations. According to the report, the CEO of the Seattle Humane Society, Brenda Barnette, said she was not

aware the dogs needed vaccinations u she was advised by the Washington Dep ent of Agriculture of this violation. www.turnto23.com/news/20967344/detail.html

This brought public outrage that animals from the local King County shelter were not being given a chance to transfer to Seattle Humane as Barnette had previously agreed. Critics claimed that bringing in out-of-state dogs reduced the number of homes available for local animals, which would then be euthanized. An e-mail response from Barnette stated that the animals in the King County shelter were sick and that is why Seattle Humane brought dogs from out of the area. Also, the Animal Control Officers' Guild blogspot, claims, "...Barnette keeps repeating she will not take our animals because they are 'diseased.'" http://kcanimalcontrol.blogspot.com/2009/10/acog-response-to-kcacc-whistleblower.html

According to L.A. Animal Services Interim GM Kathy Davis, volunteers from WA have driven to Los Angeles in a large truck three times this year to take a total of 180 small dogs to the Seattle Humane Society. The Los Angeles dogs were spayed or neutered, vaccinated, and provided with health certificates (at Los Angeles taxpayer expense) before transport. Ms. Davis said another sixty dogs are scheduled for a future trip. She also confirmed that Seattle Humane did not reimburse any of the costs. However, the Seattle Humane Society website states dog adoption fees are from $199-$275, and Ms. Barnette announced that all the dogs were quickly adopted.

These are not the only controversies in which Ms. Barnette has been embroiled. Shortly after she became head of Seattle HS, and with no municipal animal-control experience, Brenda Barnette became a member of a Citizens' Advisory Committee which hired an outside consultant to evaluate the King County animal shelter, serving Seattle and surrounding areas. There was no denial by King County personnel that improvements were needed at the shelter, but management and employees contended that much of the problem was created by inadequate funding and long Council-mandated holding periods for animals which were not adoptable, in an attempt to make the shelter "no kill." This practice results in overcrowding, fighting, injury and continual disease outbreaks.

Instead of attempting to develop ways to assist the shelter, the report indicated that the King County shelter should have its funding revoked in favor of a private partnership; i.e., "privatization." The Seattle Humane Society then began negotiations to take all the animals housed at the King County shelter. In a preliminary agreement, Brenda Barnette agreed to take all animals for $200 each. This later changed to $400 per animal, pending a $2-million grant from the County to expand Seattle Humane Society facilities.

In a press release dated 12/11/09, the Animal Control Officer's Guild demanded release of public records regarding the actions of the Advisory Committee and stated, "One of the advisory committee members heads the Seattle Humane Society, and resigned after the emails were requested via a Public Records Request." (ACOG Press Release, 12/11/09).

After a tough battle, the efforts of shelter employees prevailed. On June 15, 2010--two days before Ms. Barnette's Los Angles appointment was proclaimed by Villaraigosa--the Seattle Times announced, "King County budget panel OKs animal-control restructuring," and reported that a county spokesperson stated, "...closing the county shelter and sending animals to the Humane Society was "not an option"..." http://seattletimes.nwsource.com/html/localnews/2012126741_animalshelter16m.html

We will never know whether a different outcome regarding the shelter might have made a last-minute change in Ms. Barnette's decision to leave Seattle. According to the Seattle Times, she was still asserting on June 16, 2010, that Seattle Humane could take all the animals. And, it appears other efforts to dismantle the shelter and privatize animal care services continued to the last minute. A group called "KCACC Exposed" replaced the advisory committee on which Ms. Barnette originally served; and, in a June 14 letter the co-chairs wrote to former King County Councilman/now County Executive Officer Constantine, "...over the past three years, we have worked by your side to create *instability* in the system, for the very reason that a broken, failing system *should not be stable.*" This is a very strange statement and raises the question of what benefit there was in destroying the County shelter system—and to whom? http://workingtohelpanimalstodaytomorrow.blogspot.com/

A comment posted on the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* news site by keejay explains why there is need for concern about privatizing public animal shelters and adopting a "no kill" philosophy. He writes about one of the members of the group trying to stop funding for the County shelter:

"Note what Claire Davis proposes hidden away in her recommendations in the Community Stakeholder review. 'county should open up the county code and reevaluate the regulations related to licensing, pet limits, and special permits...so that the county can ensure that none of its existing regulations are inhibiting the development of a model, No Kill program.'

"Do you know what that means? Take AWAY animal control laws, like breeder licensing, pet limit laws (that prevent hoarding situations). Watch the puppy mill breeders, dog fighters, and hoarders escalate with NO LAWS to deal with them.

"You want to see more dog attacks? The dog fighter breeders will increase and get worse with relaxed or no regulations. And King County citizens and animals will pay the price."

http://www.seattlepi.com/soundoff/comment.asp?articleID=381882

Ms. Barnette has also been beleaguered by labor issues at Seattle HS. According to a press release issued on October 20, 2009, by the Animal Control Officers' Guild (ACOG), "The SHS with around 70 staff has had over 60 employees turnover in the last 18 months, this is over 75%! Staff fears this high rate of attrition is not just the nature of the job, but from a complete lack of attention to training, employee retention and morale by management leading to a lack of continuity in care of animals." A 10/29/09 posted comment states, " Their labor turnover rates were understandable, albeit quite high, when their new CEO first started, have continued at an alarming rate to this day...What really hurts is the subtle retaliation in spite of promises to the contrary." http://kcanimalcontrol.blogspot.com/

Facing further furloughs at L.A. Animal Services and loss of all licensing canvassers could seem a crippling blow to new GM Brenda Barnette's efforts to raise revenue for the agency; however, a letter to the editor of the Kent Reporter on 10/16/09 from Sgt. John Diel of the ACOG stated, "...Brenda Barnette also stopped selling King County pet licenses starting the beginning of 2009. This realizes a loss of around $100,000 dollars to the King County Animal Care and Control Program!" http://kcanimalcontrol.blogspot.com/2009/10/acog-response-to-kcacc-whistleblower.html Ouch, that does not bode well for the L.A. City Council's new push to have Animal Services vigorously pursue dog licensing revenue.

Although she downplayed it at the press conference, Brenda Barnette and her daughter, Mary Alice Davis, are apparently deeply involved in dog shows and purebred dogs, which casts serious doubt on her ability to create coalitions with the vast Los Angeles rescue network which abhors more pets being added to an existing overpopulation—intentionally or by accident. Barnette and/or Davis' names appear on numerous Internet dog show rosters as breeders and/or owners of various dogs back to 2003. On May 22, 2007, they both were approved for Active Membership in the Portuguese Water Dog Club of America, and Brenda Barnette's name appears on the announcement of the March 13-14, 2010 AKC trials of the Seattle Kennel Club as the AKC Legislative Representative.
http://www.barayevents.com/docs/357/document_1262.pdf

While working in San Francisco as a program-development director for the SPCA, Ms. Barnette also served as President of the Board for the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender Community Center Project (CCP).
http://friendsof1800.org/ARCHIVES/bar_05-14-98.html But it is alarming that, according to her current social and professional networking sites, Brenda Barnette does not list strong interests or affiliations other than those related to purebred dogs and kennel clubs. Most animal-control managers boast a string of involvements in national and local animal-control/humane organizations, which is essential to keep up with changes in the industry and legislation. There is righteous concern if, as the "top dog" at Los Angeles Animal Services, Ms. Barnette's position on local ordinances and state legislation continues to be dictated by the AKC.

- Home

Should ALF Factor in Vote on L.A. Animal Services GM Brenda Barnette?

Opinion by Phyllis M Daugherty
(July 9, 2010) in Society / Animal Rights

The Los Angeles City Council will shortly hold hearings regarding confirmation of the appointment of Brenda Barnette as the fifth permanent General Manager for the Los Angeles Animal Services Department in a decade.

These Committee and Council reviews are essentially just public ritual, since the City Administrative Officer's report on June 18 stated that the Mayor's appointment of Brenda Barnette, former CEO of Seattle Humane Society, was effective June 17, 2010, and Councilman Paul Koretz was present in support at the Mayor's press conference introducing her on that date.

It's no secret that Los Angeles Animal Services has been besieged by controversy -- the greatest criticism coming from the small but highly visible and vocal Animal Defense League (ADL-LA). This group has expressed discontent with each former LAAS permanent and interim General Manager, plus employees, labor representatives, and elected officials, such as Mayor James Hahn and later Antonio Villaraigosa, by posts and e-blasts which included unpleasant and often insulting comments about their personal lives, physical appearance, sexual preference, and threateningly disclosing home addresses and familial information.

More moderate Los Angeles humane groups have retreated in fear and declined to publicly pronounce their private dismay at being "painted with the same brush," as they watched their own credibility tumble in the barrage of media reports of physical and verbal protests by the ADL-LA that have punctuated public events; such as, shelter openings, and the pre-announced visits to targeted homes and communities by individuals in black costumes painted with white skeletons, waving placards with blood-red paint and various graphic accusations of "killing animals."

This time appeared to be different. Ms. Barnette is widely supported by a large base of local animal groups who believe she holds the promise of replicating in L.A. the 92% adoption rate she reports in Seattle. And, at the head of the pack is ADL-LA, which claims it has found undisputable affirmation of Ms. Barnette's professional virtues during four-days of investigative phone calls to her former associates.

In fact the group is so enthralled with Ms. Barnette that it has agreed to call off the continued picketing that has annoyed the Mayor and his staff until present. This has aroused more than a little speculation that the ADL-LA's protest hiatus may have been a consideration by the Mayor in selecting Barnette over a reported 120 candidates with varying degrees of animal-sheltering and other management experience.

But, the ADL-LA's glowing endorsement of Ms. Barnette took a rather shocking twist on June 28, when they sent out an e-mail which stated:

"...ADL-LA isn't battle weary; we've fought animal campaigns for longer then the one to STOP THE KILLING at LAA. In fact, if any of the city councilmembers vote NO on her appointment, we are fully prepared to take our protests to THEIR neighborhoods!"

This might just have been considered just political posturing until, on July 3, this same "forwarded" warning appeared on the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) website, right under pictures of animals being held by black-suited, masked rescuers. http://www.animalliberationfront.com/ALFront/Actions-USA/LAAS-Barnette.htm

Animal Liberation Front is, of course, the group known for attacks on commercial animal enterprises and research laboratories and was described by the Sydney Morning Herald (5/19/05) as listed by the FBI as a top domestic terrorism threat, "...taking 'direct action' against animal abuse by rescuing animals and causing financial loss to animal exploiters, usually through damage and destruction of property." http://www.smh.com.au/news/World/Animal-activists-top-FBI-terrorist-list/2005/05/19/1116361650307.html?oneclick=true

Thus, it appears that the ADL-LA, which vociferously fought the LA City Attorney for its right to "free speech" may, in effect, be attempting to deny that same right to Councilmembers and perhaps implicit in this, be issuing a thinly veiled threat to any others, including LAAS employees, who wish to comment in opposition to Ms. Barnette's appointment or question her philosophies or performance in the future.

There is no question that without the colorful, in-your-face campaigns of PETA (People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals) and the perseverance and political acumen of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) and other large organizations dedicated to ending animal cruelty, the public would be largely unaware of the suffering behind the closed doors of laboratories, the cramped, debilitating cages used in factory farming, the cruel mass-slaughtering practices of the meat industry, and the callous and horrific injury and deaths of millions of animals to satisfy the blood lust of animal-fighting enthusiasts.

But, is there an arguable basis upon whi personal opinions or convictions regarding the hiring of Brenda Barnette, or anyone else, as General Manager for Los Angeles Animal Services should becomethe source of a threat to elected officials and, even more disturbing, an issue of focus for the Animal Liberation Front?

See article on Brenda Barnette

http://www.opposingviews.com/i/villaraigosa-akc-rep-brenda-barnette-new-l-a-animal-services-top-doganimalissu