

By Kitty Block, opinion contributor — 03/16/18 04:30 PM EDT 98

The views expressed by contributors are their own and not the view of The Hill

27



The heartbreaking story of a 10-month old French bulldog, Kokito, who died after a flight attendant ordered that he be stowed in an overhead compartment, has horrified people across the country. As details continue to unfold — the dog apparently barked for two hours before falling silent — it is difficult to imagine how such a tragedy could occur. Sadly, however, pet deaths on planes are all too common, although the decision to relegate a pet to an overhead bin was unusual.

Kokito's death gives us an opportunity to correct our corporate and public policies around this issue, and to take a hard look at other businesses that rely on shipping dogs and cats and put them in this same kind of danger.

This incident should remind airlines, regulators and all of us how more and more, we as a society are embracing the importance of animals in our lives and acknowledging the risks to human health and safety — and sometimes life — that result when this connection is ignored.

The PETS Act, passed less than a year later, required that the needs of pets be included in state disaster plans. It is worth noting, however, that the PETS Act does not require the easing of restrictions related to pets on planes during disasters and emergency evacuations — an omission which, unfortunately, caused tremendous difficulties and confusion in evacuating people and pets from Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria.

In the same vein, people should not be asked to acquiesce to their pets being treated like cargo or luggage on commercial airplanes, subjected to extreme temperatures, poor ventilation, insufficient oxygen, inadequately secured suitcases crushing them, and rough handling.

Airline carriers, pet owners, and policy makers should work together to ensure that, when animals travel, they receive the kind of care and safety precautions worthy of a beloved companion. The Air Transport Association estimates that more than 5,000 animals are killed, injured, or lost on commercial flights each year. That's 5,000 too many.



Sens. John Kennedy [John Neely Kennedy](#) [MORE](#) (R-La.) and



Catherine Cortez Masto [Catherine Marie Cortez Masto](#) [Senate](#)

[Democrats increase pressure for FBI investigation of Kavanaugh](#) [Ten years](#)

[later: Wounds run deep from 2008 crash](#) [Attorneys general races in spotlight](#)

[as parties build bench, fight feds](#) [MORE](#) (D-Nev.) and Reps. Dan Donovan (R-



N.Y.) and Steve Cohen

Stephen (Steve) Ira CohenAthletic

directors honor best former student-athletes on Capitol HillRep. Steve Cohen

discusses what will happen if Rosenstein is firedDemocrat calls Kavanaugh a

'frat boy'**MORE**

(D-Tenn.) have already introduced bipartisan legislation to

prohibit storing live animals in overhead compartments, and we applaud them for their quick and appropriate response. This is a strong start, and we can — and should — do more to reform corporate practices and public policies to assure the safety of any pet in transit.

Most pets who fly in the cabin area of a plane fly directly in front of their human companion, in a carrier under the seat, which is where Kokito should have stayed. This type of travel is generally safe. But hundreds of dogs and other animals who are too large to fit under a seat, or who fly unaccompanied by an owner, are relegated to the cargo or belly area of the plane, where they are not monitored, are subjected to poor air quality and temperature control, and can be harmed by shifting cargo.

It was only last year that another dog died while in cargo as the plane sat on the tarmac due to a flight delay. These animals suffer in conditions similar to what Kokito was exposed to. Transporting an animal this way should only be used as a last resort.

There are some animal deaths on planes that we seldom hear about, because the animals don't even have an owner yet who will fight for them. The pet industry frequently subjects puppies and kittens to the risks associated with long distance transport. Puppies are routinely flown across the country from breeders and brokers to pet stores or unsuspecting consumers who purchase the dogs sight unseen.

Interstate transport documents obtained by The Humane Society of the United States show that many veterinarians routinely sign off on forms permitting the shipment of puppies in temperatures ranging from 10 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit.

Eight-week-old Chihuahuas, who have very short coats and scarce body fat, are shipped in the middle of winter, and short-nosed breeds like pugs and bulldogs, like Kokito, who often have difficulty breathing and cooling their bodies efficiently, are routinely shipped all summer long.

These puppies often arrive in poor condition, covered in vomit and feces, and many later test positive for contagious diseases that could easily have spread to other animals.

Kokito's death shines a light on the dangers animals face in transit, but it should also spur us to acknowledge how our policies and practices fail to square with the deep connection we feel with our family pets, and to make the needed changes.

Kitty Block is the acting president and CEO of the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS). She is an attorney and joined the HSUS in 1992 as a legal investigator and was instrumental in bringing cruelties such as horse slaughter and the killing of dogs and cats for their fur in China to light. Block's efforts led to major policy reforms in those realms, including European Union and U.S. bans on imports of dog and cat fur and bans on slaughtering horses for human consumption.

Tags Catherine Cortez Masto John Kennedy Steve Cohen The Humane Society of the United States Animal welfare Biota Animal loss Pet Dog Pet adoption Bioethics