

Energy and Commerce Committee
Commerce, Manufacturing and Trade Subcommittee
Hearing on H.R. 2012, the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act of 2013
Statement of Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky
November 21, 2013

I'd like to thank Chairman Terry for holding this hearing, which is the second in as many weeks related to the treatment of horses.

Today's hearing focuses on H.R. 2012, the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act of 2013 and the widespread doping of racehorses within the United States. I'm pleased to join Mr. Pitts, the author of this bipartisan bill, as a lead cosponsor.

Several years ago, in June 2008, I chaired a hearing in this same Subcommittee on the state of the horseracing industry. It is unfortunate – but necessary – that we meet again to discuss this issue and develop solutions to it.

At our 2008 hearing, the witnesses testified about some concerns that had been raised about the industry: the lack of a central authority to oversee racing operations across the country; the welfare of horse and jockey in an increasingly injury-filled sport; and the worrying prevalence of drugs. Those problems have still not been resolved more than five years later.

There is continued evidence of the widespread use of medications and performance enhancing drugs in horseracing. Pain medicines like phenylbutazone – also called bute – are still used to mask lingering injuries, risking catastrophic career- and life-ending injuries in the process. Drugs such as Lasix are misused in order to increase some horses' performance in the short term – jeopardizing their long-term health and safety.

These are just the drugs currently allowed. Since 2009 there have been thousands of documented cases of trainers administering illegal substances such as cobra venom to their horses.

There are several dozen regulatory agencies that govern horseracing, with different rules regarding medication use, finite resources and a limited ability to enforce their rules. As a result, these practices continue, and the impacts are telling.

Between 2009 and 2011, an average of 24 horses died on the racetrack each week, often having to be euthanized after catastrophic failures. This is a sobering statistic, and if human athletes were regularly snapping legs or worse, it would be clear that there was a problem in need of a fix.

The status quo harms the long term viability of the horseracing industry as a whole and subjects horses and jockeys to unnecessary risk.

The Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act would address many of the problems plaguing the industry. With the passage of this bill, the playing field would be leveled across the nation: horses at facilities allowing interstate betting would be prohibited from receiving medications in the 24 hours prior to racing and would face stiff penalties for breaking the law.

H.R. 2012 would designate the U.S. Anti Doping Agency (USADA) as the industry's independent anti-doping organization, and require a national standard governing drug use in racehorses. No longer would corrupt individuals be able to avoid states with stronger regulations, racing their doped-up horses to exhaustion and death.

I urge my colleagues to work to assure the integrity of horseracing as a sport through the passage of this legislation – for the sake of the horses, the jockeys who ride them, and the citizens who watch and wager on races.

I yield back the balance of my time.