

Testimony

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Subcommittee on Health
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**For a Hearing Entitled
“Improving Safety and Transparency in America’s Food and
Drugs”**

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Chair Eshoo, Ranking Member Burgess, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Dr. Douglas Corey and I have been an equine veterinarian for more than 40 years in a five-person mixed animal practice located in Walla Walla, Washington. I am here today, not only as a long-time horse owner, but also as a Past President of the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP). The AAEP is a professional association which represents the vast majority of equine veterinarians and veterinary students, many of whom are long-time horse owners as well. Our mission is dedicated to the health and welfare of the horse. Our headquarters is in Lexington, Kentucky.

I have served as the Chair of the AAEP's Equine Welfare Committee, the American Veterinary Medical Association's (AVMA) Animal Welfare Committee, and the Unwanted Horse Coalition. I currently serve as a member and past chairman of the Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association's Animal Welfare Committee and I serve on the American Horse Council's Animal Welfare Committee.

I want to make three main points today:

1. There is little evidence that meat from equines raised in the United States poses a threat to human health.
2. This bill will negatively impact the health and welfare of horses across the country and offers no solution to the problem of unwanted horses in the U.S.
3. The AAEP and industry have taken a leadership role in developing potential solutions for many of the unwanted horses.

This legislation seeks to ban the knowing sale or transport of equine or equine parts in interstate or foreign commerce for purposes of human consumption because it would deem equine meat unsafe under the Federal Food and Cosmetics Act. There is little evidence that shows consuming equine meat from horses raised in the United States poses a threat to public health.

Each country accepting horse meat is responsible to ensure that the product is safe for its citizens to consume. As an example, horses being transported to

Canada for processing must be held in holding facilities for six months to ensure there are no medication residues. Additionally, the meat of horses processed in both Mexico and Canada is tested for drug residues, heavy metals and bacterial contamination exactly like what is done with beef and pork and the European Union has its own regulations regarding drug residues in horse meat.

Our primary concern is this bill will negatively impact the health and welfare of horses across the country and offers no solution to the problem of unwanted horses in the U.S.

Guided by a dedication to equine welfare, the AAEP is actively involved in the issues that surround the care of unwanted horses in the United States. The AAEP has evaluated H.R. 961 based on the legislation's ability to serve the health and welfare of the horse.

The unwanted horse represents a group of horses within the domestic equine population that are no longer wanted, needed or useful; or their owners are no longer interested in them or are not financially able to provide the horse with the appropriate care.

As written, the Safeguard American Food Exports Act will negatively impact the welfare of horses because it offers no viable solution to the problem of unwanted horses and will actually increase their numbers. The legislation does not provide

the financial resources necessary to create the infrastructure and provide veterinary care to the thousands of horses impacted by a ban on processing horses, In addition, we feel strongly that, if passed, this bill will not stop the processing or slaughter of horses. Therefore, the AAEP and its membership, based on a multiple membership surveys, vigorously oppose this legislation as it is currently written.

The AAEP's chief concerns regarding H.R. 961 are:

1. Long-term placement of affected horses. It is estimated that approximately 80,000 - 100,000 horses are transported to Canada and Mexico for processing annually. Should we remove this option for horse owners, how are we going to care for these horses? The proponents of the legislation suggest that the additional horses will be absorbed by the alternative homes and rescue and retirement facilities. However, these options are already under stress. While there may be some capacity at some facilities, simply put, there is not enough funding, volunteers or placement options for all of the current unwanted horses across this country, let alone the additional 80,000 - 100,000 horses that would be impacted by this legislation. This is exacerbated during times of recession. We applaud the many volunteers, including veterinarians, involved with these sanctuaries and facilities. The simple fact is that should this bill be enacted, the number of facilities, their capacity, funding and adoptions will have to increase significantly in order to match the demand and care for

these horses for their life expectancy of 20—30 years. Where will the additional facilities and funding come from?

In addition, many of the individuals who adopt horses are often unprepared for the costs to adopt and provide proper care and feeding for a horse. While many of these people are well-intentioned individuals, the sad fact is that without proper resources, many of these horses are headed for a much worse fate of starvation, neglect, and abandonment.

It would be nice to absorb every unwanted horse into the equine society, but as history has proven, there simply are not enough people with the desire, means, knowledge and/or assets available to respond to the need. While efforts by the AAEP and others in the equine and animal welfare industries have improved the care of unwanted horses and promoted responsible ownership, there will always be those horses that are unwanted and are not provided with the care that they need. Some of the reasons horses become unwanted include lack of time and money, owner health issues, change in family circumstances by the owner, the horse is unsuitable, and/or it has bad behavior and can be dangerous.

2. The funding of care for unwanted horses. H.R. 961 does not address the funding required to care for or dispose of an additional 80,000 - 100,000 horses per year. Assuming an average cost of \$5 per day to provide a

horse's basic needs, the funding needed per year, per horse is approximately \$1,825. This does not include veterinary and farrier care. Inadequate funding often creates inadequate care, which is a significant welfare concern for unwanted horses. Should the horse owner decide to euthanize the horse, the disposal alone can range from \$400 for euthanasia and burial to up to \$2000 for cremation.

3. Language of the bill itself. H.R. 961 seeks to prohibit the knowing sale or transport of equines or equine parts in interstate or foreign commerce for purposes of human consumption. This bill would not stop the transportation of horses for other reasons, including sporting events, sales, recreation or transportation for medical care. Once they cross the border, this language would not stop horses from being processed.

My final point is the AAEP and equine industry are developing solutions for the issue of unwanted horses.

For more than sixty years, our association has been a renowned leader in promoting and fostering the welfare of horses. The AAEP and its members are educating horse owners and the industry about the importance of providing the appropriate care for their horses throughout their lives. We are hopeful that this concerted effort will reduce the number of unwanted horses in the United States.

The AAEP currently partners with a number of equine and animal welfare organizations that have, since the AAEP hosted the first Unwanted Horse Summit nearly 15 years ago, enhanced efforts and outreach to improve rescue, retirement and re-homing facilities, promoted more adoptions, and offered safety net programs for owners in need of assistance for obtaining care for their horse, including stallion castrations, euthanasia and even disposal assistance.

We continue to maintain and offer resources to promote horse owner responsibility, and we support equine rescue and retirement facilities with a 32-page booklet titled the *AAEP Care Guidelines for Equine Rescue and Retirement Facilities*.

As you can see, this industry is coming together to address this industry problem. Our equine veterinary members are on the front line every day helping horses and are committed to solving this problem.

The AAEP's position on processing is that horses destined for a processing facility should be:

1. Treated humanely and with dignity.
2. Transported according to guidelines approved by the U.S.D.A. in 2002 regarding the commercial transportation of equines to processing.
3. Euthanized in a humane manner in accordance with guidelines established by the AVMA.

The AAEP believes that processing is not the ideal solution for addressing the large number of unwanted horses in the U.S. However, if a horse owner is unable or unwilling to provide humane care and no one can assume the responsibility, humane euthanasia at a processing facility in accordance with the AVMA's euthanasia guidelines is an acceptable alternative to a life of suffering, inadequate care or abandonment. We believe that humane euthanasia at a processing facility is preferable to seeing an unwanted horse left to a life of starvation, neglect or abuse.

In summary, the equine industry and you, our congressional leaders, must work together to address the root cause of the unwanted horse, not just the symptom of processing. We need proactive solutions and we believe that the AAEP, veterinarians across this country, the equine industry and animal welfare advocates are developing solutions that will continue to help decrease the number of unwanted horses being processed. However, and most importantly, supporting H.R. 961 will not improve the welfare of the horse. This bill offers no solution to the problem of unwanted horses.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I will be happy to answer any questions.