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Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce

Legislative Hearing to Protect Consumers and Strengthen the Economy
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Chairman Schakowsky, Ranking Member Bilirakis and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present testimony in support of the Save America's Forgotten Equines (SAFE) Act of 2021 (H.R. 3355) and the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act (H.R. 5441). The SAFE Act would finally place a permanent ban on horse slaughter in the United States and the export of American horses for slaughter, while the PAST Act aims to eliminate the failed system of industry self-policing, strengthen penalties against the soring of horses and ban devices that are integral to the soring process. For the purposes of this statement, we will focus on the SAFE Act.

My name is Neda DeMayo, and I am the founder and president of Return to Freedom Wild Horse Conservation (RTF): a national nonprofit wild horse and burro advocacy organization. As a lifetime equestrian and advocate against horse slaughter, I first became involved in the wild horse issue in 1994 and incorporated Return to Freedom in 1997. A year later, RTF founded its American Wild Horse Sanctuary in Lompoc, Calif.

RTF has worked to end horse slaughter of over 20 years alongside our representative in Washington, D.C., Chris Heyde, who initiated the national campaign to end horse slaughter in 2001 and continues to actively lead efforts before Congress on this important bill. He is one of the few working on this issue to have been inside an operating horse slaughter facility in the United States, followed trucks hauling horses to Mexico and Canada and gone undercover in auctions selling horses to slaughter across the United States. His efforts have shown the urgent need to end this cruel practice and refute the excuses put forward to defend it. I am submitting for the record an article that Chris wrote for us marking the 20th anniversary of the bill which was February 14th of this year.

RTF works to meet the immediate needs of rescue and sanctuary for wild horses and burros while striving to provide humane, non-lethal solutions to preserve wild horses in free-ranging herds. RTF has played an active role in the rescue and rehoming of more than 2,000 at-risk horses and burros.

We now care for more than 450 wild horses and burros at our sanctuary's three California locations – horses and burros that might have otherwise fallen into the foreign slaughter pipeline.

Our sanctuary has provided us with the opportunity to share the story of America's wild horses and burros, from their legacy as a reintroduced native species to the challenges that they face. Some sanctuary visitors are surprised that there are still wild horses and burros roaming our public lands, but there is no doubt why people of all ages continue to visit: Americans have an unwavering bond with the descendants of the horses that have helped build our country and shape our culture.

Horse slaughter is the ultimate betrayal of that bond.

With the support of Congress, advocates have succeeded in keeping horse slaughter plants closed within our borders since 2007, the foreign slaughter pipeline remains a shameful open secret for a horse-loving country such as ours.

That an unknown number of wild horses and burros – animals that are federally protected while roaming our public lands – are among those sent to slaughter each year adds further insult to injury. It is an insult to the taxpayers who have invested so much into our wild herds in the more than 50 years since Congress unanimously passed the Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (Act) out of concern for their dwindling numbers.

Congressional appropriators have repeatedly told the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) that they cannot sell captured wild horses and burros without protections against slaughter. Yet, wild equines are among those that die in foreign slaughterhouses each year.

How can that be? Because once title is passed from the BLM or USFS, immediately to buyers and after one year to adopters, wild horses and burros lose their federal protection and are no longer tracked by the agencies. The agencies are allowed to sell a wild horse or burro ages 10-older or that has been passed over for adoption three times, a change made to the Act without public knowledge and something RTF has worked to reverse.

As for adoptions: In 2019, the BLM created an Adoption Incentive Program (AIP) that pays adopters \$1,000 per wild horse or burro in an effort to reduce off-range holding costs. This has resulted in adopters holding wild horses or burros for a year, collecting the cash, then auctioning off horses or burros at places where known kill buyers are waiting.

RTF has urged the BLM to address public and congressional concerns about the safety of adopted wild horses and burros. While some changes have been made to AIP, more must be done to protect captured wild horses and burros from having their lives handed over to people willing to make a quick buck from their deaths, abusive homes or even well-meaning adopters that cannot afford a horse or burro – all ways that they can end up in the slaughter pipeline.

It must be stressed that wild horses and burros are captured and removed from the range and placed at risk of slaughter by federal mismanagement that has stretched over decades. In the absence of predators, the BLM (as well as USFS) continues to try and fail to meet low, arbitrary population targets by capturing and removing wild horses and burros while scarcely implementing proven, safe and humane fertility control. As a result, thousands of wild horses and burros are removed from their home ranges each year in controversial and often deadly helicopter roundups.

Please keep in mind: More than 90 percent of horses – domestic and wild – exported for slaughter are in good condition, according to a U.S. Department of Agriculture study. These are healthy animals enduring terror, trauma and pain in crowded trailers bound for Mexico and Canada. Then, on the killing floor, horses can have their throats cut while fully conscious.

That is unacceptable and un-American.

And yet, it has been more than 20 years since the first bill to ban horse slaughter was introduced, only to be reintroduced over and over again. In the time since:

- Voters from both parties have repeatedly voiced overwhelmingly opposition to horse slaughter. As recently as December, a poll found that 83 percent of Americans oppose it. This is opposition that holds strong regardless of political affiliation.
- Congress has consistently supported language in annual Agriculture Appropriations bills blocking horse slaughter; however, this de facto ban does nothing to protect thousands of American horses shipped to foreign slaughterhouses each year.
- Support for this legislation within Congress is strong, with 215 bipartisan House cosponsors as of today.
- Attention to equine aftercare and retirement have greatly improved and the number of quality rescues continues to grow.
- The number of horses exported for slaughter has plummeted from more than 166,000 per year in 2012 to 23,431 in 2021, thus exposing false claims of “unwanted horses” flooding the system should slaughter and the export of horses for slaughter be banned.

This is not some thriving business employing many. Rather, it is one in which an unscrupulous few continue to profit from cruelty by irresponsibly sending unwanted healthy animals to an ugly, undeserved death – while also threatening human life because of the many veterinary medications that American horses routinely receive.

It is time to end this ongoing tragedy out of respect for the lasting connection that our country has had with the horse – in work and at war and in play – and out of concern for both horses and human health.

I strongly urge you to be part of a proud new chapter for America’s horses by advancing this popular bipartisan bill.



20 Years Ago Today, Congress Took Up the First Bill to End Horse Slaughter

By Chris Heyde

Lobbyist, Return to Freedom

Feb. 14, 2022

I never imagined I would still be fighting to end horse slaughter, but as the classic Beatles song goes, it was 20 years ago today that our first federal bill aiming to ban horse slaughter was introduced in the United States House of Representatives by then-Rep. Connie Morella, R-Maryland.

The American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act (H.R. 3781) was a straightforward ban on the slaughter of American horses for human consumption or their export for the same purpose. It came as the result of visits I took to the New Holland Livestock Auction in Pennsylvania after hearing about what was happening there from a friend and colleague, Liz Clancy Ross. Ross had visited the auction where horses, many of them quite healthy, were being bought by unscrupulous “killer buyers” who were then trucking them to slaughter. Three U.S.-based, foreign-owned plants (a fourth in Nebraska had recently closed) were brutally slaughtering these majestic animals and exporting the meat to high-end diners in Europe and Asia. Horses were trucked over the border for slaughter there. Additionally, in order to meet the demand, horses were imported into the United States from Canada and Mexico for slaughter as well as exported to those countries for the same purpose.

Year	To Canada	To Mexico	Total
2002	25,219	774	25,993
2003	21,434	818	22,252
2004	19,725	4,114	23,839
2005	17,324	7,821	25,145
2006	21,709	11,080	32,789
2007	32,452	45,609	78,061
2008	42,232	56,731	98,963
2009	52,405	46,098	98,503
2010	53,803	52,862	106,665
2011	59,743	67,782	127,525
2012	55,781	110,791	166,572
2013	42,102	102,554	144,656
2014	40,410	105,375	145,785
2015	40,670	84,938	125,608
2016	29,472	78,724	108,196
2017	12,273	67,289	78,857
2018	10,568	70,708	81,708
2019	10,486	53,947	64,433
2020	6,919	29,966	36,885
2021	5,139	18,292	23,431
2022	612*	2,152*	2,764*

*As of March

I had to see for myself and subsequently visited the auction on multiple occasions. What I witnessed was heartbreaking, but I knew I had to follow the trail further. I arranged to visit the Caval International slaughterhouses in DeKalb, Ill. – something nobody else had done. My report from the Animal Welfare Institute Quarterly speaks of the unthinkable cruel treatment horses endured there. I had seen the suffering with my own eyes. I knew the only remedy was a complete ban on horse slaughter. Ross and I began drafting legislation and, soon after, Rep. Morella agreed to introduce the bill.

As we visited with lawmakers to recruit congressional support for Rep. Morella's bill, we continued to build a vast library of knowledge about horse slaughter. We collaborated with grassroots activists to track horses going to the domestic plants and across our borders into Canada and Mexico. We partnered with wonderful people providing rescue and sanctuary to horses in need. We made close ties with residents and officials adjacent to the U.S. plants who strongly opposed their presence. We befriended experts who shared their knowledge about horses and the suffering they endured. We spoke to those with hands-on knowledge of the transport issues involved (the horses were being moved on double-deck trailers designed for cattle and pigs – a practice we eventually outlawed for horses going to slaughter). We spoke with horse owners, with veterinarians, and with the American public. In short, we built an incredibly strong campaign to end the slaughter of American horses.

Support for banning slaughter caught on like wildfire. Hundreds of elected officials on Capitol Hill signed their names to the bill. It also touted enormous support in the horse racing industry, and with general horse owners, business moguls, high-profile athletes, and scores upon scores of celebrities. Press interest ran high. After a few years, the energy around the issue caught the eye of other animal welfare organizations that joined the fight. And yet, opponents claimed that horse slaughter was a “necessary evil” to dispose of “unwanted” horses. The quagmire grew thick. While public support for a ban continued to grow, the bill got stuck in the mud. In short, our horses continued to suffer the horror of slaughter at the expense of petty politics. Today, a full ban remains elusive.

That is not to say that there has not been tremendous progress in the meantime. By discovering and enforcing an existing 1949 state law in Texas, two plants there were closed. The Belgian-owned Cavel International plant in Illinois was shuttered after I worked with state legislators (including then-state Sen. Barack Obama) on the first outright state legislative ban on horse slaughter. Unfortunately, the transport of horses to slaughter comes under federal regulation, making state-level policy only a temporary solution.

While a vast network of horse rescue facilities and sanctuaries continues to grow, today there are very few Americans unaware of horse slaughter. Congressional support for a ban remains high and vocal opponents of a ban are thankfully few and far between, though still lurking in the shadows. Those who once cried that a ban on horse slaughter would lead to a flood of “unwanted horses” across the fields of America, who said a ban would cause horse abuse and neglect to rise, have been proven wrong. Yes, American horses still go to slaughter – across the border to Canada and Mexico – but the numbers have declined significantly with each passing year. Last year, fewer American horses were slaughtered than ever before, but one horse lost to this industry is one too many.

Americans have spoken loudly and clearly. The American people oppose the inhumane slaughter of this country's horses, period. Twenty years later, the case for ending horse slaughter in America is stronger than ever, and it is time for Congress to pass our bill into law.



Necessary Evil or Blind Eye? Putting an End to the Cruel Practice of Horse Slaughter

BY CHRISTOPHER J. HEYDE

To most Americans the horse slaughter industry exists only in the phrase “to be taken to the glue factory,” but this antiquated phrase is off the mark. Neglected, surplus, or discarded horses considered burdensome are currently more likely to fall victim to slaughtering in the United States for human consumption abroad.

AWI has long fought against the cruel and inhumane conditions within livestock slaughterhouses. Horse slaughter facilities are no different and may, in fact, be worse. Since horses in the US are not raised or consumed for their meat, the horse slaughter industry manages to avoid much of what little oversight exists. Until

December 7, 2001 no regulations even existed in the US governing the treatment and care of horses during transport to slaughter.

Horses end up in slaughter in a variety of ways, all unlucky. Sometimes they are sent to slaughter by individuals or groups no longer able or willing to care for them. Sometimes they are retired or injured race horses, riding school or show horses, federally protected wild horses, foals born as a by-product of the Premarin© industry, or stolen horses. Auction houses provide an easy out for irresponsible equine owners to discard an animal they no longer want while getting some cash in return. Those purchased at auctions by individuals known as “killer buyers” are then shipped on double-deck trailers for as long as several days without adequate water, food, or rest only to

arrive at the slaughterhouse where workers abuse them right up to the actual slaughter.

To better understand the cruelty perpetrated by the horse slaughter industry I went to one of the three remaining US-based, foreign-owned horse slaughterhouses (two in Texas and one in Illinois) to witness what takes place. It didn't take long to realize that all of the horrible stories were going to prove true before my eyes within the 45 minutes I was there.

Located at the rear of the nondescript facility was a double-deck trailer fully loaded with horses. They filled both rows and were unable to stand normally, forced to keep their heads low. Despite the fact that several of the horses I could see had cuts and blood trailing from their mouths and noses, all looked healthy and fairly young. Only a few horses at a time were removed from the truck so many were still on board when I left. When some were moved off the trailer, workers poked them with long fiberglass rods through holes on the side of the trailer. The horses, typically very sensitive animals, slid and fell down the ramp only to be whipped by another worker's rod. All of the horses at the facility exhibited fear typical of “flight” behavior in horses, pacing in prance-like movements with their ears pinned back against their heads and eyes wide open.

Once inside the building more callous workers, standing high on the railing that lined the stalls, beat the horses on the nose, forehead, neck, back, or hindquarters to get them to move. This continued until they entered the kill chute.

Two egregious acts of cruelty took place right in front of me. Running across the floor of the barn was a grate-covered drain about three feet deep. A section of the grate was missing in one of the stalls through which horses were being forced. Because they were crammed into a space and panicking, each horse fell into

the open hole, unable to get out since the floor was wet and slippery. Workers continued to beat the horses until they were able to throw their bodies out of this hole. Due to the overcrowding and panic, a large male got his leg hooked over one of the upper rails. Again, workers proceeded to beat him continually until the horse lunged forward gouging his leg open on the solid metal fence, which forced his leg free of the rail. Federal law requires the presence of a US Department of Agriculture inspector during slaughter, but an inspector was nowhere to be found.

I left the facility with a sense of utter disbelief at the magnitude of the brutal treatment. These horses were not old, sick, or past recovery. They were adoptable. One can only imagine how many more horrific incidents take place at this and other slaughterhouses each day without any oversight.

Many of those aware of this practice simply say the industry is a “necessary evil,” that slaughtering horses is a responsible way to dispose of those who are either sick, abused, or no longer wanted. However, these people stand to gain from the industry. Selling horses to slaughter provides additional money to purchase another horse or

*At the end of his life he should be retired, adopted, or humanely euthanized if no better solution can be found. Anything else makes a mockery of the words which for centuries have been used to describe our game...
Sport of Kings.*

—John Hettinger, Trustee, New York Racing Association

extra cash to those stealing them. These horses are being slaughtered simply because the option exists, and money can be gained. There can be no defense of this industry.

John Hettinger, a Thoroughbred owner well known in the Thoroughbred community, has taken the issue head on. He received several awards from the Thoroughbred industry for his tireless campaign to educate owners and push for a ban on slaughter. Mr. Hettinger, in a letter strongly refusing a statement issued by the “Horse Industry,” rebuffed its claim that the “Horse Industry” is opposed to a ban on horse slaughter. He said, “I doubt if there is complete

unanimity on this issue, but have NO doubt that if ALL horse owners were polled the slaughter of horses would be a thing of the past.” Mr. Hettinger further said that, “The only people with a stake in this game are a handful of people called

(throughout the ‘Horse Industry’) killer buyers and the callous and irresponsible people who dump their horses at the end of their usefulness.”

Allowing slaughter to continue is simply turning a blind eye to the larger problem of cruelty, neglect, and complete irresponsibility. Horses should not be abused whether they are at a racetrack or on a farm. Anti-cruelty laws exist in every state and should be enforced when animals are being abused. Simply exchanging one form of cruelty for another is not the answer.

Mr. Hettinger summed up the need for a total ban when he noted, “Absent legislation those of us involved in this work are doing what we can to remedy a shameful situation. With a ban on slaughter we could concentrate all our efforts on making sure that the other quality of life problems of horses will receive more and better attention than they ever have before.”

AWI's companion organization, the Society for Animal Protective Legislation, together with the Doris Day Animal League, is working with Congresswoman Constance Morella (R-MD), who introduced legislation called the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act, to ban the domestic and international transport of live horses or horse meat for human consumption. 🐾



Opposite page: Two terrified horses await their fate at a US slaughterhouse. Photo by Gail Eisnitz/Humane Farming Association.

Left: Retired horse lives at peace on one of the many horse sanctuaries throughout the US.