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animal
wellness
action

May 26, 2022

The Honorable Jan Schakowsky
Chairwoman
U.S. House Subcommittee on Consumer Commerce and Protection
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis
Ranking Member
U.S. House Subcommittee on Consumer Commerce and Protection
2322 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairwoman Schakowsky and Ranking Member Bilirakis:

I write today with thanks to you for affording the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 5441, the opportunity to be highlighted in today's hearing. As the Subcommittee record shows, I served as an expert witness the last time the legislation saw action, then known as H.R. 1518, before the Subcommittee in November 2013. My testimony came less than a year after I had served two terms as president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association (2010-2012), the breed registry established in 1935 in Lewisburg, Tennessee.

Over the past 40 years, there has been no more important issue to me than to see the Tennessee Walking Horse regain its rightful position as America's horse – the horse that John Wayne, Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, and Elvis Presley once rode.

For the breed to achieve that end, there is one key problem that must be overcome that continues to suppress the breed: the issue of soring. Soring is the intentional infliction of pain to Tennessee Walking Horses' front legs and feet by means of applying caustic chemicals such as kerosene, abrasive hand cleaners, croton oil, mustard oil, and others to the skin, or inserting sharp objects into the horses' hooves to achieve the artificial high step known as the "Big Lick," which is prized in rural parts of Tennessee, Kentucky, Alabama, and North Carolina.

I speak with great experience and authority on the topic as a World Grand Champion, seven-time World Champion, and eight-time Reserve World and World Grand Champion competitor in Tennessee Walking Horse events. I began showing these horses at age 4 and grew up in the breed. Along the way, I have seen everything there is to see in the Tennessee Walking Horse

world, the worst being horses sored so badly that their feet “looked like pizza with the cheese pulled off,” as I testified in 2013.

Furthermore, as the PAST Act also effects Racking and Spotted Saddle Horses, I have owned a Racking World Grand Champion and have judged the National Spotted Horse Association World Championship event held in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. These horses and the Tennessee Walking Horse have been the most plagued by soring time and time again.

In the 1950s, the Tennessee Walking Horse was the fastest growing breed in the U.S. until the practice of soring took root, and that practice has decimated the breed ever since. Articles about the walking horse from the 1960s in Sports Illustrated and LIFE Magazine read nearly the same as articles published on the subject in 2022, and the Tennessee Walking Horse is today the pariah of the equine world.

The Horse Protection Act (HPA) of 1970 was enacted more than 51 years ago under the leadership of my late friend U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings, D-MD., who authored the law, to help stamp out soring. Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, the law has achieved very little success:

- Lack of funding for enforcement has been a key issue until 2020, when Animal Wellness Action worked with leaders in the breed to secure more than \$2 million for enforcement of the HPA for FY21, and more than \$3 million in funding for FY22.
- The 1976 amendment to the HPA that created the current self-policing scheme has allowed corruption to run rampant. While it has been more than a decade, I have witnessed that corruption firsthand, seeing horses that were completely sound and not sored disqualified so a wealthier participant could win, and on the other hand I have seen countless horses that have been sored the day of the show pass through inspections with flying colors under a flawed inspection program that has been based on opinion, human error, and questionable decisions. In fact, I met with the U.S. Dept. of Justice in 2016 to provide information on the corruption and saw no interest from DOJ to take action.
- Weak penalties have allowed USDA to give merely a slap on the wrist to decades-long violators of the HPA, which has driven countless individuals away from the breed because they can't compete in the soring culture that continues to prevail. Only felony-level penalties can create a deterrent to driving meaningful reform.
- Despite strictures against chemical soring, the horses still suffer owing to the permissible use of large, stacked shoes and ankle chains in the showing. These medieval devices are designed to cause the same type of pain as the chemicals used to sore the skin, and objects used to sore the hooves. It's the same Big Lick animal cruelty, and these devices are integral to the soring process.

PAST addresses each of these issues with the exception of funding, which must be achieved through the appropriations process each year, and that is why I first spoke out publicly in support of the legislation in 2013 and have continued to press for its enactment ever since.

The last decade has taught us one thing for certain: A small group of Senators from states where soring prevails can indefinitely block the PAST Act from passage in the Upper Chamber.

That's exactly what happened in the last Congress following the House passage of the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics Act, H.R. 693, then led by Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore., and renamed in honor of my late friend at the request of his family, Mary Tydings Smith, and Ben Tydings Smith, who continue to carry on Senator Tydings' more than half a century of work to end soring.

Make no mistake, the PAST Act will help end soring, but it unfortunately will not see the light of day in the Senate due to the opposition from a few, and the opposition from every major walking horse group in the nation, primarily because the stakeholders in Tennessee, Kentucky, and other areas were never offered a seat at the table or the opportunity to give input into the drafting of the legislation before it was first introduced. While I believe the PAST Act could help the Tennessee Walking Horse thrive and flourish, others believe it will destroy the entire walking horse show circuit.

There has been no one who has worked harder or in a more creative manner to see the PAST Act or portions of it enacted through law or regulation than I, but every single attempt over the past decade has failed. This includes two farm bills, a four-year long USDA rulemaking process, and more. We went as far as attempting to get the Federal Register to publish a regulation on Inauguration Day in 2017 for the first time in American history, working with Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn., the current lead sponsor of the bill; the late Senator Tydings; former Rep. Ed Whitfield, D-Ky., the original lead sponsor of the legislation; Priscilla Presley; and others. The Director of the Federal Register, Oliver Potts, refused to publish the regulations, and those regulations were rolled back as soon as the new Administration took the reins. In a one-two punch, two Administrations failed to end soring.

In light of those circumstances, Animal Wellness Action worked with leaders in the walking horse breed in 2020 to make revisions to the bill that would achieve buy-in from the breed organizations. The revisions would still eliminate the ankle chains and provide felony penalties as the current PAST Act does, but allow a smaller, removable shoe used by other breeds like the American Saddlebred to remain. The revisions would give USDA enforcement authority and set up a supporting enforcement program that would leave the walking horse breed with a voice and minority stake.

The compromise we negotiated in 2020 went even further than PAST by ending the use of treacherous devices known as tail braces, which hold the horse's tail in a U-shaped position after the ligaments in the tail have been severed — all for a certain prized “look.” The PAST revisions effectively marry the bill with alternative legislation introduced by Members of Congress who have long opposed PAST from Tennessee and Kentucky, the Protecting Horses from Soring Act, H.R. 6341.

But some animal groups opposed revisions to PAST and are pushing that failed 2017-era USDA regulation that faces a very long pathway, absolute certain legal challenges, and potential reversal in any new administration. Rather than banking on that uncertainty, Congress can and should deliver comprehensive reform with compromise legislation to H.R. 5541 in a full House Energy and Commerce Committee markup and then move the measure to the House floor for a vote.

In 2020, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II bestowed a tremendous honor upon me with recognition of my life's work to end soring, only the second time in the history of the British Crown such an award has been given. The honor came as a result of the tremendous personal sacrifices I've made to advance the PAST Act, losses that led to my own bankruptcy, divorce, and much more.

Madam Chairman, Ranking Member, there is no doubt we all want to do the right thing to protect the horses, but wanting to do the right thing, and knowing what the right thing is, are two entirely different matters. As the world's foremost expert on the subject of soring and the Tennessee Walking Horse, I ask you please take to heart what we are advocating for today, and take action to show us what my faith and loss has been worth by delivering meaningful, durable, enforceable reforms in a markup through the legislative process to help deliver a compromise that will protect the horses we all care so deeply about.

I have also included supplementary items in the form of opinion works I've penned over the past decade on the subject, and other articles on attempts to amend the HPA and end soring, as well as letters of support from 2020 for the compromise effort we attempted in the same spirit that Tydings' did in 1970 with the late U.S. Senator Howard Baker, R-Tenn.

All the best,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marty Irby". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marty" being more legible than the last name "Irby".

Marty Irby
Executive Director
Animal Wellness Action



November 3, 2020

U.S. Senator Mark Warner
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

U.S. Senator Mike Crapo
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

U.S. Senator Marco Rubio
284 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

U.S. Senator Rick Scott
716 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Warner, Crapo, Rubio, and Scott,

Alaqua Animal Refuge is a state-of-the-art animal rescue center located in Freeport, Florida. Since 2007, we have been working to end animal cruelty, and have rescued and rehomed more than 25,000 animals, including hundreds of horses. We are one of the only equine rescue groups in our region, and collaborate with law enforcement state wide for cruelty and neglect cases. We've also long been a supporter of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 693/ S.1007, and we are grateful to Senator Crapo and Warner for leading the charge on this legislation. We also appreciate Senator Rubio's cosponsorship of the PAST Act in the 113th Congress when it was led by Sens. Kelly Ayotte, and Warner.

The soring of Tennessee Walking, Racking, and Spotted Saddle Horses, is a plight that has had a terrible impact of many of the horses in these three breeds that have ended up in shelters like our own. We were thrilled to see the PAST Act clear the U.S. House last July, and the vast support from the Members in Florida. For many years, the Tennessee Walking Horse industry held a "Big Lick" show close by in Panama City, and we saw first hand the cruelty that was displayed at the so-called "Gulf Coast Charity Music Festival and Horse Show." Fortunately, several years ago, advocates were able to convince the City of Panama City to bring these events to an end, and with it an end to torture of these horses in the Florida panhandle.

But the cruelty still exists close-by in South Georgia, and in South Alabama – and it's still very rampant. We had hoped to see the PAST Act move through the U.S. Senate, but we recognize

that feat appears to be virtually impossible with Sens. Mitch McConnell, Marsha Blackburn, Lamar Alexander, and Rand Paul blocking the bill. It may take another decade or two before the bill has a chance of passing the Senate, and in the meantime, horses continue to suffer.

The Horse Protection Act of 1970 the PAST Act seeks to improve, has not been amended since 1976, and in light of the crippling blow that the Senators from Tennessee and Kentucky have dealt the PAST Act, we hope that you will work to do something to help the horses.

We have reviewed the revised PAST Act and the proposed compromise legislation that Animal Wellness Action and others have negotiated with the Tennessee Walking Horse industry and we offer our full support and endorsement of the revisions.

We were very happy to learn the new proposal would eliminate the use of the tail brace that the existing PAST Act failed to address, that was a significant detail missed in the legislation first introduced some eight years ago. Cutting and docking tails is a terrible practice that causes horrific pain to the horses, and we want to see that practice end just as much as we want to see the removal of the ankle chains and large stacked shoes. Allowing a smaller removable shoe to be utilized in exchange for the removal of the tail brace is a huge win for horses.

We ask that you please move the new proposal forward to a vote in the U.S. Senate, and that each of the four of you support the measure, and work together to get the bill signed into law before the end of the current Congress. Please feel free to use this letter to advance the revised PAST Act and contact us at 850-880-6694 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "LHood". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter "L" being large and stylized.

Laurie Hood, Founder and President
Alaqua Animal Refuge
914 Whitfield Road
Freeport, Florida 32439
www.alaqua.org



November 16, 2020

The Honorable Mark Warner
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Crapo
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kurt Schrader
U.S. House of Representatives
Representatives Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ted Yoho
U.S. House of
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senators and Representatives,

On behalf of the CANA Foundation, a New York-based organization dedicated to helping horses, I want to underscore our deepest appreciation for your leadership in advancing the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, which seeks to stop the barbaric practice of horse soring – the intentional injuring of the forelimbs of a Tennessee Walking horse in order to induce an exaggerated gait. I write to urge you to put your shoulders into a compromise that will end soring in the United States, which has the potential to make its way through the Senate before the end of the year.

Horse soring has been forbidden in some form since 1970, but the law is antiquated and incomplete, with horse trainers readily circumventing it at their will. It needs a rehaul.

Rehauling the Horse Protection Act was the purpose of the PAST Act. While we applauded the House for passing the bill in the 116th Congress, we cannot help but note that there has been no

movement on the companion measure introduced by Senators Crapo and Warner. The four Senators from Tennessee and Kentucky seem steadfastly opposed to it. They seem prepared to deploy any and all parliamentary maneuvers, whether in the majority or minority, to stymie its progress.

We are excited that a compromise agreement has been reached between the Tennessee Walking horse industry and leading animal protection advocates. This legislation will ban action devices, dramatically reduce the size of the stacked shoes horses are forced to wear, eliminate the industry's self-regulation program which will increase authorization and lead to more robust enforcement, and establish felony-level penalties for violators. In addition, it strengthens the PAST Act by including provisions to ban tail braces, distracting devices, and alligator clips.

Please signal your support for the PAST Act substitute before the end of 2020. Thank you very much for your work for our great American equines.

Manda Katic



November 17, 2020

The Honorable Mark Warner

U.S. Senator

Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Warner,

Sincerest congratulations on your resounding re-election on November 3rd. You have served the Commonwealth of Virginia with distinction as our Governor and as our U.S. Senator, and the people of our state continue to place our faith in you.

On behalf of Dominion Equine Welfare -- an all-volunteer organization based in Fairfax that works to ensure the welfare of domestic and wild equines through education, advocacy and strategy -- I ask for your urgent attention to a compromise bill to halt the inhumane practice of soring.

Specifically, we respectfully ask you to consider amending your bill, the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, and to adopt a compromise that has the potential to clear the Senate and the House and be signed into law before the year ends.

Dominion Equine Welfare has long supported the PAST Act and your efforts to ban the barbaric practice of soring.

After eight years of trying to pass it, you and the animal welfare community of Virginia must regrettably conclude that the legislation is unable to pass in its current form and with its current set of political opponents.

That means we must modify the measure in a way that will pass muster with the critics of the proposal. Fortunately, that moment is here.

Virginia's leading animal welfare groups are enthusiastic about supporting a substitute version of the PAST Act and to provide an essential upgrade to the Horse Protection Act of 1970.

This compromise, as you know, will forbid the use of chains and other action devices, shrink the size and weight of shoes, eliminate the industry's self-policing scheme, and make soring a federal felony. It will also ban tail braces, which involve breaking the tail of horses just for cosmetic purposes.

I hope you will lead this effort in the U.S. Senate and work to pass the PAST Act substitute before the end of 2020. Also, reconsider your stance on banning horse slaughter and the transport of horses to slaughter in Canada and Mexico

Thank you so much for fighting for America's horses – the creatures that helped the settlement and growth of our country. It's time to pay them back by securing their protection in modern American sport.

Sincerely,

Tim Parmly

Co-Founder

A qualified tax-exempt, nonprofit organization • EIN #46-3811056
www.dominionequinewelfare.org • dominionequinewelfare@gmail.com • 10603 Orchard St. Fairfax, VA. 22030

Be Informed. Be Involved.



PO Box 100968 Arlington, VA 22210 www.homewardtrails.org

October 28, 2020

The Honorable Mark R. Warner
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Warner,

On behalf of the Homeward Trails Animal Rescue a non-profit animal welfare organization that works throughout Virginia, I write to thank you for your work to advocate for the Prevent All Sorting Tactics (PAST) Act and to urge you to seize the moment and pass the compromise worked out between key leaders of the Tennessee Walking horse industry and the animal welfare community

As our former governor and our senior U.S. Senator, you have always gravitated toward solutions-oriented policy-making, working across the aisle and with industry and advocates to make practical gains for the Commonwealth and the rest of the nation. When it comes to stopping the mistreatment of horses in the Tennessee Walking horse world, your ability to find a path forward and secure a solution to the long-running problem of horse soring would be a remarkable accomplishment, adding to your record of astute legislative action.

Homeward Trails has been deeply concerned about the routine injuring of the front feet and legs of Walking horses. Trainers and owners soring horses to induce a high-stepping gait is a diabolical practice.

It was right and proper for the United States to enact the Horse Protection Act in 1970 to ban horse soring. But that original horse protection statute was insufficient in dealing with trainers clever enough to skirt the law. As a consequence, soring persisted. When you took on this issue nearly a decade ago, we finally felt there was hope in stemming the problem.

Despite your ability to attract bipartisan support, it's clear that a small group of your colleagues have been successful in thwarting your legislative ambitions.

Because of the negotiation on the issue – which preserves so much of the PAST Act, and even strengthens it in some ways – you can finally get this bill enacted. That outcome cannot happen soon enough.

I am glad that your bill will eliminate action devices, stop the use of tail braces, and dramatically reduce the size of the shoes. Just as important, it establishes felony-level penalties for violators. There must be stronger penalties so that abusers are looking over their shoulder and understand that the risks of criminal animal cruelty exceed the rewards.

Our team at Homeward Trails Animal Rescue and our more than 41,000 followers across Virginia and beyond support your anti-cruelty efforts. We truly hope you will take this compromise and run with it, getting it passed and signed by the President before the year is out.

We are most grateful for your keen attention to this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sue Bell", with a stylized, flowing script.

Sue Bell
Executive Director

FROM THE DESK OF
BENJAMIN TYDINGS SMITH

October 28, 2020

U.S. Senator Mark Warner
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Mike Crapo
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Ben Cardin
509 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen
110 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Warner, Crapo, Cardin, and Van Hollen:

We appreciate your many years of work and support to end the painful scourge of soring that's marred the Tennessee Walking Horse breed for more than six decades. Your leadership and cosponsorship of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, S. 1007 / H.R. 693 has been a guiding light to equine advocates across the country and has given us hope that this abuse will one day be brought to an end.

My grandfather, the late U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings, D-MD, authored the Horse Protection Act of 1970 the PAST Act seeks to amend. The House-passed bill, H.R. 693, is named in his honor the "U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics Act." As you well know, the measure cleared the House by a vote of 333 to 96 with all Democrats voting in support of it and the majority of Republicans. Unfortunately, the bill hasn't seen any movement in the Upper Chamber, and that is something we expected. With staunch opposition from Senators that hail from Tennessee and Kentucky, our family, along with many others, knowing how the U.S. Senate was designed to operate, recognize there is no viable avenue forward for the bill in its current House-passed and Senate-introduced form.

My grandfather spoke often about compromise. He spoke often about compromise related to the Horse Protection Act (HPA) of 1970, and how he reached across the aisle to the late U.S. Senator Howard Baker, R-Tenn., to pass the measure and secure the very first law to protect our iconic American equines – whose very backs this country was built upon. He went further, and he reached across the aisle to ensure that President Richard M. Nixon signed the bill into law, and he conveyed it wasn't easy. He knew the HPA wasn't perfect, he knew the measure could have done more – but he also recognized that the perfect should never be the enemy of the good, and that supporting progress for horse protection was the right thing to do. The status quo was not acceptable to Joe Tydings.

I write today on behalf of the Tydings family with a full endorsement of the revisions to the PAST Act that Animal Wellness Action, stakeholders in the Tennessee Walking Horse breed who had no voice in

FROM THE DESK OF
BENJAMIN TYDINGS SMITH

drafting the House-passed PAST Act, and leaders in the House and Senate have worked to achieve that will hopefully move the measure through the Senate, and ensure it becomes law. We believe that the revisions to the bill will achieve a great future for the Tennessee Walking Horse breed while protecting the horses and ensuring the breed's economic viability. We believe that eliminating the chains and action devices from the horses' feet will solve the majority of the problems related to soring, and that allowing a smaller shoe to be utilized will put the "ponies," as my grandfather referred to them, on a level and fair playing field with other show horse breeds. We believe the new language that provides a hyper-detailed inspection system makes the House-passed bill even better.

Furthermore, we are pleased to learn of the elimination of the gruesome device known as the tail brace, the ban on the possession of mustard oil, croton oil, zip ties, alligator clips, and other soring and distraction items that the House-passed PAST Act did not include.

Please feel free to contact us with any questions and feel free to utilize this letter as needed in support of the modified bill. Our family cares deeply about this issue and we are certain that my grandfather would be in full support of moving the compromise forward to get the measure signed into law before the 116th Congress ends. We are glad to help in anyway that we may be of service.

Kind regards,

Benjamin Tydings Smith



Equine Collaborative International, Inc.

7004 Liebler Rd.
Colden, NY 14033
716-912-2100
411eci@gmail.com
21 October 2020

U.S. Senator Mike Crapo
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Mark Warner
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Crapo and Warner,

We, as members of Equine Collaborative International, Inc. (ECI), appreciate all your years of work to end the scourge and abuse that has stained the Tennessee Walking Horse breed for more than sixty years. Your leadership representing the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, S. 1007/H.R. 693 has been a guiding light for equine advocates across this Country, and has given us hope that this torture will one day soon be brought to an end.

We were ecstatic when the measure passed the U.S. House in July of 2019, but understand that it has stalled indefinitely in the U.S. Senate due to the Members that represent States where soring is still rampantly practiced. It is a shame, but we have some understanding of the political process and the parameters set forth by our Country's founders and recognize that the Senate was intentionally designed to create challenges in passing legislation.

ECI originated in New York State and has worked to support the PAST Act for several years, as several of our members previously belonged to another non-profit and were able to hold several events which included presentations by longtime advocates like Marty Irby and Carl Bledsoe. Both are members of our organization and have spoken at events and/or contributed information on the topic for our Newsletter, Groundwork. Mr. Irby and Mr. Bledsoe have kept us apprised of the status of both the ongoing soring and progress of the PAST Act.

We write to you today with a full endorsement of the revisions to the PAST Act that Animal Wellness Action, the Tennessee Walking Horse Celebration, and the leaders in the House and Senate have worked to achieve. Hopefully, the revisions will help to move the measure through the Upper Chamber and ensure that it becomes law. We believe that the revisions will create a great future for the Tennessee Walking Horse breed, which holds such a significant place in the history of our Country, while protecting the horses and ensuring the breed's economic viability. Eliminating chains and action devices will easily solve many of the problems related to soring and allow a smaller shoe to be used. This will put the breed on a level and fair playing field with other breeds like the American Saddlebred.

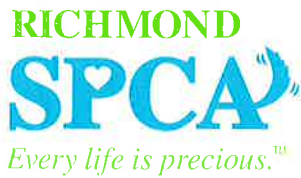
In addition, we are elated to learn of the addition of the elimination of tail braces, bans on the possession of mustard oil, croton oil, zip ties, alligator clips and other soring and distraction devices that the House passed PAST Act did not include.

Please feel free to contact us at the address, phone and e-mail above,

with any questions and to use this letter of endorsement, as needed, in support of the new bill.

Sincerely,

Phyllis Jensen, Equine Collaborative International, Inc., Board of Directors, President



Tamsen Kingry
Chief Executive Officer

October 27, 2020

The Honorable Mark Warner
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

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Dear Senator Warner,

On behalf of the Richmond SPCA, I want to express our thanks for your national leadership in seeking to put a stop to cruelty in the form of "horse soring." Your bill, the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PACT) Act, has been an important marker for the nation in establishing the goals of banning action devices on show horses' legs, halting the use of heavy stacked shoes that distort the gait of the animals, establishing felony-level violations for the crime of soring, and putting USDA in charge of inspections at all regulated horse shows.

We have become aware of an effort to forge a compromise between Tennessee Walking horse industry leaders and some of the industry's biggest critics. I understand an agreement has been reached and have reviewed the terms of the agreement. The Richmond SPCA supports this kind of effort to secure meaningful progress on an issue of animal cruelty that has persisted for so long. We support the specific provisions of the compromise which achieve the core purposes of the PACT Act.

As our governor and as our U.S. Senator, you have always worked to find solutions and to forge common ground. This sort of agreement is precisely the kind of solution that you have come to be known for in our state and in our nation. We support your leadership against horse soring.

The PACT Act has not moved in the Senate since it was introduced in 2012. This bill, with you and Senator Crapo and Senators Alexander and McConnell, now has a chance to move forward. Please know that the Richmond SPCA is supportive of your helping to finally make this compromise progress for horses a reality.

This measure does away with chains and action devices, it eliminates the big and heavy stacks that the horses have attached to their forelimbs, it upgrades penalties to felony-level, and more. We are particularly pleased about the new provision to ban tail braces – an unacceptable and inhumane cosmetic procedure.

It is our hope that the PACT Act will soon be enacted and we appreciate your efforts to achieve that success. Please let me know if there is any way that we may be of help to you. Thank you so much for your support of animal welfare.

Sincerely,

Tamsen H. Kingry
Chief Executive Officer

RICHMOND SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS
THE CENTRAL VIRGINIA HUMANE SOCIETY | RICHMOND SPCA

2519 Hermitage Road, Richmond, VA 23220 | 804-521-1300 | richmondspca.org



October 27, 2020

The Honorable Mark Warner
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Warner,

On behalf of the Virginia Federation of Humane Societies, whose leaders represent key animal welfare organizations throughout the Commonwealth, I ask you to support the modified version of the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act that is now being discussed in the Congress.

We are immensely grateful for your leadership, as the Democrat lead, on the PAST Act. We have followed your work on this bill for years, and wholeheartedly support your effort to stop abusive soring of Tennessee Walking horses. This is a disgraceful practice, and it is alarming that the bill has not been able to move in eight years since you helped introduce it in the Senate.

We were particularly pleased to see the U.S. House pass the PAST Act in its current form, by a vote of 333 to 96.

At the same time, despite your best efforts, it appears there's been no movement in the Senate because of the obstructionism of Senators from Kentucky and Tennessee. We have been alerted to the elements of the compromise bill, and miraculously, we understand that Senators McConnell and Alexander support the legislation. With your support, we are confident it can become law this year.

Horse soring is a barbaric practice. Show horses should not be subjected to cruelty for mere entertainment. We sincerely hope that this new measure, by banning chains and action devices, reducing the size of heavy, stacked shoes, doing away with a self-regulation enforcement plan, and establishing felony-level penalties for violators will relegate this medieval practice to the history books.

In some ways this bill strengthens the PACT Act by including provisions to ban tail braces, distracting devices, and alligator clips.

We hope you and your colleagues will take up the compromise measure during the lame-duck session. It would be a tremendous advance to have this legislation signed into law before the end of the year.

Sincerely,

Debra Griggs
Treasurer/Immediate Past President

Virginia Federation of Humane Societies
P.O. Box 545 Edinburg, VA 22824
www.vfhs.org

November 3, 2020

U.S. Senator Mark Warner
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

U.S. Senator Mike Crapo
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

U.S. Senator Lamar Alexander
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

U.S. Senator Marsha Blackburn
357 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Warner, Crapo, Alexander, and Blackburn:

As a former Tennessee Walking Horse owner, I would personally like to thank you for working together to end the horrific practice of soring. In 2014, I endorsed the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act that finally passed the U.S. House in July of last year by a vote of 333 to 96, and now lingers in the U.S. Senate with no viable pathway forward in its current House-passed and Senate-introduced form.

The practice of harming animals to achieve the high stepping gait, and championship awards that has become a culture of abuse in Middle Tennessee and around the Southeastern U.S. has persisted since the 1950's. For a number of years while living and maintaining a farm in Tennessee as a country music artist my family and I owned breeding stock and young Tennessee walkers we placed in training. When a trainer informed us that the soring of Tennessee Walking Horses was required to compete in the "big lick" segment of the breed, we decided to disband our herd and disassociate ourselves from the Tennessee Walking Horse. We would never want to see anyone harm animals, and we were not willing to allow our horses to be abused.

In our breeding program we worked with Marty Irby during his time at Waterfall Farms, and I am pleased to learn of the revisions to the PAST Act and the proposed compromise legislation that he and others at Animal Wellness Action have negotiated with the industry – I fully support and endorse the revised PAST Act. I believe that eliminating the chains and other action devices from the horses' feet in the showring will effectively eliminate 80% of the soring in the industry, and the new detailed inspection program will eliminate the majority of the remaining 20%. I'm also encouraged to learn of the elimination of the tail brace in the showring that the original PAST Act did not address – that's a major gain for this legislation and for the protection of the horses.

Respectfully, I hope that each of you will utilize every resource possible to ensure the revised PAST Act becomes law before the close of the 116th Congress. Please feel free to utilize this letter to that end and to contact me at 615-435-3142 with any questions you may have.

Sincerely,



Mark Miller



SAWYER BROWN

2865 Sawyer Bend Road • Franklin, TN 37069

P.O. Box 210586 • Nashville, TN 37221

615.799.2229 • Fax 615.799.9312



Monty & Pat Roberts, Inc.

Creating a better world for horses and people...

November 3, 2020

U.S. Senator Kamala Harris
112 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

U.S. Senator Diane Feinstein
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Mark Warner
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

U.S. Senator Mike Crapo
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Warner, Crapo, Feinstein, and Harris,

I write today in appreciation for your years of leadership and co-sponsorship of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 693/S.1007, that I first endorsed and have long advocated for since 2013 when I first wrote to its author, former U.S. Rep. Ed Whitfield, R-Kentucky.

The PAST Act has seen great support, but despite 52 cosponsors in the U.S. Senate, and 333 votes in support of the measure in the U.S. House, the House Republican Leadership team all voted against the bill last July, and it has stalled indefinitely in the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation. This is something we expected would happen with Senators from Tennessee and Kentucky in opposition to the bill, and competing legislation led by those Senators in the mix.

When Marty Irby asked me to endorse and support the PAST Act in 2013, not long after he testified in support of the bill before the U.S. House Commerce Committee, I was elated to do so, and so glad to see that legislation to finally end soring was on the table.

In 1939 at the age of four, I rode and competed in my first horse show. At eighty-five I have known no other life but that of life with horses. Four universities and two doctorates in behavioral sciences along with a major education from the horses themselves, I won 11 world championships from the saddle.

Surviving a violent childhood, I sought to perfect the training of horses in the absence of violence. Queen Elizabeth II observed my work in 1989 and directed me to take the concepts to the world. I have demonstrated my non-violent principles in 41 countries with over 12,000 horses. We now run free resilience-building workshops for veterans, police, fire, first responders and their families.

The three-day program, Horse Sense & Healing, involves working closely with horses, including the "Join-Up" process. Over the three days, participants and horses develop a special bond built upon mutual trust and respect.

The influence of the Queen encouraged me to go to Tennessee in 2005. It was there that I met Marty Irby and began my quest to assist in the elimination of the practices used in the 'big lick' competitions within the Tennessee Walking Horse breed. There is no bad Tennessee Walking Horse. It is the people who do 'bad things' to the horses. I witnessed this abuse for the first time in 1949 and have desired to assist in its abolishment for the balance of my life.

My family and I have worked with the Tennessee Walking Horse industry in an attempt to effectuate change within the breed to end the horrible practice of soring, and the use of large-stacked shoes and ankle chains. At that time, we met great resistance, and in fact, when we attended the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration in 2006, the show failed to crown a World Grand Champion for the first time since 1939, because the majority of entries were deemed to be victims of abuse.

Earlier this year, I reached out to Marty Irby to see how I might be help in delivering the message to Congress that the PAST Act should become the law of the land. I was informed of the potential compromise agreement that Irby and others at Animal Wellness Action had been working on, and delighted to hear the possibility of garnering support and buy-in from the those involved in the walking horse breed who had no input in drafting the original PAST Act.

I have no doubt that the elimination of the chains and action devices, along with the increased penalties will eliminate much of the current soring issues, and am pleased to learn of the removal of the atrocious tail braces, along with the ban on the possession of mustard oil, croton oil, zip ties, alligator clips, and other soring and distraction items that the original PAST Act did not include.

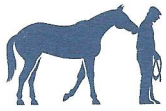
Furthermore, the new inspection protocols the revised PAST Act details are a great new addition to the bill and will ensure that science-based objective testing is instituted so that violators of the law can finally be prosecuted. The current system is very subjective in nature, and the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture has failed in enforcing the Horse Protection Act because the results of these subjective tests will not withstand argument in the courts.

I write to you today in full support of the amended PAST Act provisions and ask that you work diligently to ensure the compromise passes the Senate and is signed into law before the close of the 116th Congress. Please feel free to contact me with any questions and to utilize this letter as needed in support of the altered PAST Act.

Sincerely,



Monty Roberts



Monty & Pat Roberts, Inc.

Creating a better world for horses and people...

December 16, 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

It saddens me to realize that there are human beings walking among us who twist and turn on issues such as the fair treatment of animals. There has never been a day in my life where I considered Tennessee Walking Horses to be a personal gain for me in any way, shape or form. They are horses which fall into the category of flight animals. They cannot lie nor can they twist and turn the facts of any issue for personal gain.

It is my position that reaching every goal to assure fairness for the Tennessee Walking Horse may come in small steps. If given the right to do so, I could sit down and write a proposal which would immediately ban any force, pain or violence in the training of any horse, for any discipline. This may not be allowed by the political world that we live in, but doing that would certainly be a part of my life-long desire to leave the world a better place than I found it, for horses and for people too.

Given my 80+ years of seeking to reach that goal, it is mind boggling to me that the horses are still trying to teach us that violence is never the answer. Why seemingly intelligent human beings could twist their thinking to criticize me is more than I can imagine. I won't let it bother me and I continue my promise to the horses that I will do my best to continue seeking a better relationship for them than we have witnessed throughout my 80+ years.

To attack me for the positions I have taken is just as unjust as the human who would sore an animal to achieve a higher score. I would ask them to realize that they are soring me in an attempt to get a better score from certain individuals who have something to gain and don't seem to mind hurting other animals to lift their score. The horses have, for thousands of years, been honest with us and never lied to us. We should attempt to follow their good example.

If Marty Irby and his team of PAST Act supporters believe we are headed in the right direction with their recent decisions, then I support them. I remember a time when Marty Irby was ensconced in the center of the very activities that he is trying to prevent. Marty Irby has more experience in one little finger than Keith Dane or most of the people who would lash out in a similar fashion than those who would put acid on the legs of an innocent, helpless but honest horse.

Sincerely,

Monty Roberts



U.S. Senate Democrat Leader Chuck Schumer
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer,

New Yorkers for Clean, Livable, and Safe Streets (NYCLASS) appreciates all of your many years of work to end the scourge and abusive practice of soring that has stained the Tennessee Walking Horse breed for more than sixty years. The leadership representing the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, S. 1007/H.R. 693 has been a guiding light for equine advocates across this country, and we are grateful for your co-sponsorship of that important legislation.

We were elated the measure passed the U.S. House in July of 2019, but we understand that it has stalled indefinitely in the U.S. Senate due to the Members that represent states where soring is still rampantly practiced, and that it remains buried deep under a pile of good bills that the U.S. Senate continues to refuse to take up for consideration. It is a shame, but we have some understanding of the political process and the parameters set forth by our Country's founders and recognize that the Senate was intentionally designed to create challenges in passing legislation, and that compromise, albeit imperfect, is the greater good that can be achieved in the Upper Chamber.

We write to you today with a full endorsement of the revisions to the PAST Act that Animal Wellness Action, the American Horse Protection Society, Animal Wellness Foundation, Horses for Life Foundation, Center for a Humane Economy, family of the late U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings (D-MD) who authored the Horse Protection Act of 1970, and U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-Oregon) have worked with Republicans who have long opposed the PAST Act to achieve a compromise reform effort.

Hopefully, the revisions will help to move the measure through the Upper Chamber and ensure that it becomes law, and we ask that you, as Senate Democrat leader, to support the inclusion of this compromise reform in the COVID package being deliberated this week. We believe that the revisions will better protect the horses from abuse and is the greater good for these majestic animals. Similar to the horse-drawn carriage abuse issue in Manhattan, we believe that taking incremental steps in the right direction for equine protection is far greater for the welfare of the horse than maintaining an obstructionist view of immediate perfection.

Eliminating chains and action devices that this compromise reform achieves will easily solve many of the problems related to soring. In addition, we are elated to learn of the addition welfare provisions the original PAST Act didn't contain: the elimination of terribly gruesome tail braces, bans on the possession of mustard oil, croton oil, zip ties, alligator clips and other soring and distraction devices that the House-passed PAST Act did not include. Please feel free to contact us at 917.940.2725 or Edita@nyclass.org with any questions and to use this letter of endorsement, as needed, in support of the PAST Act compromise for reform.

Sincerely,

Edita Birnkrant
Executive Director, NYCLASS

NYCLASS (New Yorkers for Clean, Livable, and Safe Streets) is a 501(c)(4) non-profit organization founded in 2008 that works to enact animal welfare legislation into law and elect pro-animal candidates to office. NYCLASS is committed to changing the world for animals and seeks to create a truly humane society for all by passing New York City, State and Federal legislation, embracing grassroots efforts and on the street activism to educate and activate the public to protect animals and end abuse.
www.NYCLASS.org

November 11, 2020

Senator Mike Crapo
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Representative Kurt Schrader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Senator Mark Warner
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Representative Ted Yoho
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Forwarded to the above members via email delivery.

RE: Horse Protection Act Amendments / PAST Act of 2020

To Whom It May Concern:

I write on behalf of PawPAC, a California statewide committee for animal protection, to support amendments drafted to the **Horse Protection Act**, via the **U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics Act of 2020**. The issue of horse soring has continued unabated for too many years. In any state, individuals who inflict extreme pain and torture on animals are subject to arrest on animal cruelty charges, yet the same crimes are condoned when performed en masse — in this case, in the name of sport, entertainment and financial gain. We as a society are promoting a double standard on this and many other fronts.

We understand that details as outlined in the attached language have garnered support from key stakeholders on both sides of the issue, and would hope to see advances made based on those understandings. We encourage a budget which substantially provides for enforcement, which these amendments include.

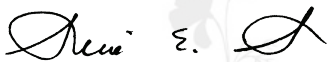
Last year, Congress saw fit to pass the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act (PACT) Act, which has set a federal precedent with regard to animal cruelty. Now Public Law 116-72, the statute outlaws serious bodily injury to “one or more living non-human mammals, birds, reptiles, or amphibians” — including “extreme physical pain” and “protracted loss or impairment of the function of a bodily member” — both of which are caused to horses in the gut-wrenching practice of soring.

Our law has provisions to protect reptiles and amphibians, as well it should, while leaving in peril the majestic horse, which built this great country from barren land, and which embodies the American spirit. How then, do we justify our collective treatment of horses? How do we justify that an industry may commit acts which are otherwise classified as crimes?

Let the record state that PawPAC is entirely against all forms of animal cruelty, both individual and societal, and would rather see a complete prohibition of the convoluted, contemptible practice of horse soring, but if by these amendments there is a pathway to change, then we urge you to take them and pass this act without further delay.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak for those who otherwise have no voice.

Sincerely,



René Rowland, Chair

Encl: “U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics Act of 2020”

PawPAC | P.O. Box 4635 Downey, CA 90241 | 877.484.2364 | www.pawpac.org

✉ email  @CAPawPac



PawPAC

Working for Animals and Their Environment Since 1980





Progressive Animal Welfare Society

15305 44th Ave W t: 425.787.2500
PO Box 1037 f: 425.742.5711
Lynnwood, WA 98046 www.paws.org

November 2, 2020

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
United States Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell,

On behalf of the Progressive Animal Welfare Society, a Pacific Northwest animal welfare leader dedicated to helping animals thrive since 1967, I want to thank you for long-standing support of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, which seeks to stop the barbaric practice of horse soring – the intentional injuring of the forelimbs of a Tennessee Walking horse in order to induce an exaggerated gait. I am writing today to ask you to support a compromise that will end soring in the United States, which has the potential to make its way through the Senate before the end of the year.

Soring has been illegal in some form since 1970, but the law is weak and desperately needs an upgrade. That was the purpose of the PAST Act, which passed the House with 333 votes in 2019. However, there has been no movement on the companion bill introduced by Senators Crapo and Warner. The four Senators from Tennessee and Kentucky have long opposed it, and they are prepared to use parliamentary maneuvers, whether in the majority or minority, to stymie its progress.

We are excited that a compromise agreement has been reached between the Tennessee Walking horse industry and leading animal protection advocates. This legislation will ban action devices, dramatically reduce the size of the stacked shoes horses are forced to wear, eliminate the industry's self-regulation program which will increase authorization and lead to more robust enforcement, and establish felony-level penalties for violators. In addition, it strengthens the PAST Act by including provisions to ban tail braces, distracting devices, and alligator clips.

I hope you will support and promote the enactment of this legislation before the end of 2020. I would welcome the opportunity to speak with you or your staff about it. I am reachable at the phone number and email below. Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Heidi Wills

CEO

206.265.3040

hwills@paws.org

cc: Chuck Stempler, PAWS Board President; Muriel Van Housen, PAWS Board Member

people helping animals



October 26, 2020

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell,

Pasado's Safe Haven, based in Snohomish County and serving the entire state of Washington, is a leader in the fight against animal cruelty. I write you today to ask for your support for legislation to stop the practice of horse soring in the United States.

We know you are already a cosponsor of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, and for that we are immensely grateful. We endorsed that bill some years ago and have activated our membership in support of it.

The PAST Act passed the House in 2019 in a commanding vote, but in its current form, it does not appear to have a viable pathway for passage in the U.S. Senate. Senators McConnell and Alexander, among others, are determined not to let the measure pass.

We have been alerted to a compromise bill negotiated by leaders of Animal Wellness Action and the Tennessee Walking Horse leadership. We have reviewed the terms of the agreement and enthusiastically support this legislation. We understand Senators Alexander and McConnell support it.

We are aware of your prior leadership in making animal fighting a felony offense in the United States. Your Animal Fighting Prohibition Enforcement Act was a landmark measure, and we hope you will play a similar leadership role in helping to abolish a similarly intense and cruel practice.

Horse soring is a barbaric practice that involves injuring the pasterns and lower portion of the feet to cause the animals so much pain that they exaggerate their gait and step high to win ribbons at shows. Soring is illegal, but the underlying law has not been effective. We sincerely hope that this new measure, by banning chains and action devices, reducing the size of heavy, stacked shoes, doing away

with a self-regulation enforcement plan, and establishing felony-level penalties for violators will relegate this medieval practice to the history books.

In some ways this bill strengthens the PACT Act by including provisions to ban tail braces, distracting devices, and alligator clips.

We hope that the Senate takes up the bill in the lame-duck session. It would be a tremendous advance to have this legislation signed into law before the end of the year.

Sincerely,



Laura Henderson
Executive Director
Pasado's Safe Haven



For the Animals,

Susan Michaels
Compassion Trust

October 28, 2020

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member, Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell,

I write on behalf of the Susan Michaels Compassion Trust on a matter of critical importance to our founder, Susan Michaels: equine protection. After all it was an *Equidae* family member, the donkey Pasado, whose savage beating death by teenagers in Pasado's barn in Kirkland that propelled Susan to lobby Olympia (including in 1993 when you were a member of the House) for an upgraded felony offense animal cruelty law, and to found Pasado's Safe Haven, which today remains one of the leading animal advocacy organizations in the state.

With the mission advancing public policy and making grant awards in the area of farm animal protection, our Trust was founded upon Susan's passing in December 2018.

Senator Cantwell, you have had an exceptional record on animal welfare, and I deeply appreciate your support for the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act, which seeks to stop the injuring of the legs of horses to cause them to exaggerate their gait.

Though it has attracted tremendous support, that bill has been blocked repeatedly in the Senate. It appears the only way to advance this policy is to secure an agreement from the key parties. It is my understanding that such an agreement has been achieved.

As Ranking Member of the Commerce Committee – where the bill has been assigned – you can help push this compromise over the finish line. By all accounts, it is a major advance that offers the prospect of ending horse soring.

Sincerely,



Mitchell Fox
Co-trustee



November 9, 2020

The Honorable Mike Crapo
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mark Warner
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Kurt Schrader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Ted Yoho
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Senators and Representatives,

On behalf of SPCA International, a U.S.-based non-profit that works for animal welfare domestically and across the globe, we urge you to support a substitute version of the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act that can pass the Congress this year and be signed into law by President Trump. We so appreciate your leadership in introducing the PAST Act, which we have supported since introduction.

We do understand that the PAST Act substitute does not replicate every provision of your original bill, but the point of a compromise is to tweak an original bill offering and to adjust it to secure key support. That's what this bill will do.

Most importantly the bill makes soring itself a federal crime and it makes the offense a felony. It also bans action devices and tail braces, among accomplishing many other specific goals long sought by animal welfare advocates.

The PAST Act moved in the House in 2019, but as introduced, our contacts report that the U.S. Senate will not take it up. It is opposed by the Senators from Kentucky and Tennessee, including Majority Leader Mitch McConnell. Senator McConnell is likely to remain as Majority Leader, and if not, he will almost certainly serve as Minority Leader, with 50 Members in his caucus. Either way, he'll have the ability to block the original legislation.

It is time to upgrade our federal Horse Protection Act to give it some teeth, and ban the barbaric practice of horse soring. This bill may allow us to achieve that goal.

With your active support, the Senate takes up the bill in the lame-duck session. Thank you for considering our request that you swing behind it.

Sincerely,

Meredith Ayan

Meredith Ayan
Executive Director
SPCA International





November 12, 2020

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell
317 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

U.S. Senator Rand Paul
167 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

U.S. Senator Mark Warner
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

U.S. Senator Mike Crapo
239 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators McConnell, Paul, Warner, and Crapo,

As lifelong horse breeders and owners, our farm lays claim to breeding countless Thoroughbred champions including the 1982 winner of The Kentucky Derby, Gato Del Sol, and the 2000 Kentucky Derby Winner, Fusaichi Pegasus. We care deeply about ending cruelty in the equine world, specifically the doping and slaughter of America's horses.

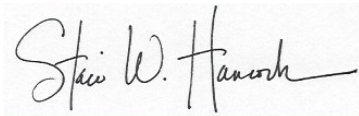
We also care about a plague that has marred the equine world since the 1950's: the gruesome practice of "soring" Tennessee Walking Horses, a practice utilized to achieve the pain-based high step known as the "big lick."

We appreciate the introduction of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, and the Horse Protection Amendments Act that seek to end this terrible practice of soring that runs rampant in Tennessee and Kentucky – it's been dragging down the entire equine industry for more than half a century, and has had a negative impact on all equine breeds. While we've long supported the PAST Act, we recognize that the measure has no support from any of the major groups in the walking horse breed, and that no one in the breed was consulted or offered the opportunity to give input on the legislation that was first introduced in the House in 2013. We also recognize that the Horse Protection Amendments Act is a response to the PAST Act, and we hope the marriage of these two bills will soon be achieved.

We ask that you work together and press for the revised PAST to clear the Senate, so that the bill may be inked into law before the close of the 116th Congress, and the end of the year.

To quote Mahatma Gandhi, "The greatness of a nation can be judged by the way its animals are treated."

Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of Arthur Hancock in cursive script.Handwritten signature of Staci W. Hancock in cursive script.

Arthur and Staci Hancock
Stone Farm, Paris Kentucky



October 29, 2020

Senator Mark Warner
703 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Warner,

On the behalf of Horses For Life Foundation, I'm reaching out to you regarding horse soring and the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PACT) Act, H.R.693/S.1007. As a stalwart leader on this issue, we sincerely appreciate your dedication and tenacity to eradicate this egregious form of equine cruelty.

As you very well know, in July 2019 the U.S. House voted to pass H.R.693 by an overwhelming majority of 333-96. Your companion bill in the Senate, S.1007, introduced with Senator Crapo, currently has over 50% of the Senate as cosponsors. Clearly, we are at a tipping point to finally signing this vital legislation into federal law — the only hurdle is to overcome the obstructionists.

In a successful effort to mitigate opposition from the Walking Horse Industry and certain members of Congress, negotiations have been made that presents a window of opportunity for the PAST Act to cross the final threshold into law. The modified legislation has the support of Tennessee Walking Horse leaders, as well as Senators Alexander (R-TN), Blackburn (R-TN) and McConnell (R-KY).

In addition to retaining the core provisions of the PAST Act, additional protections for the horses have been added to the legislation. Key highlights include;

- Bans possession of mustard oil, croton oil and salicylic acid; all substances utilized in soring
- Bans the use of all tail braces and tail sets, and prohibits cruel tail docking
- Bans possession of zip ties, alligator clips, and other distraction devices that harm the horses

Ending the abuse of horse soring must finally come to an end, and we hope you'll support the revisions made to the PAST Act and continue to drive the legislation forward.

Again, thank you for your dedicated leadership on this important issue. It's incumbent on all of us to work together, to ensure the equines within the Walking Horse Industry are no longer subjected to the senseless, abject torture of soring.

Sincerely,

Allondra Stevens, Founder and President

Opinion Works Published in Support of Efforts to End Horse Soring:

LEXINGTON **HERALD** **LEADER**

To stop horse slaughter and soring abuses, support these two measures in Congress

By Marty Irby

May 24, 2022 10:21 AM



Undercover video footage released in 2012 documented cruel treatment of horses in the Tennessee walking horse industry. It showed the use of painful chemicals on horses' front legs to force them to perform an artificially high-stepping gait for show competitions. This practice, known as "soring," has been illegal for more than 40 years under the federal Horse Protection Act but enforcement is spotty. *Humane Society of the United States*

On Thursday, the House Energy and Commerce Committee will highlight two key measures to stamp out terrible abuses in the horse world, and better protect our iconic American equines.

The [Save America's Forgotten Equines \(SAFE\) Act](#) and [Prevent All Soring Tactics \(PAST\) Act](#) are both measures that have consistently been introduced in every Congress for the better part of a decade.

SAFE would ban the slaughter of equines and the transport of equines across state and federal lines for slaughter. While horse slaughter in the U.S. no longer takes place, [some 23,000 American horses were exported and slaughtered in Canada and Mexico last year](#) to be served up on foreign dinner plates. Every American equine is at risk of falling into this predatory industry just as the 1986 Kentucky Derby winner, Ferdinand, when he was sold for slaughter in Japan.

The PAST Act addresses the [issue of soring](#) – the intentional infliction of pain to Tennessee Walking Horses' front limbs by means of applying caustic chemicals such as kerosene, mustard oil, and other chemicals to the skin or inserting sharp objects into horses' hooves in order to produce an artificial high step known as the "Big Lick," that's prized at events like the [Kentucky Celebration in Harrodsburg each September](#).

PAST would amend the Horse Protection Act (HPA) to give the law more teeth by banning the use of [large-stacked shoes and ankle chains](#) used in the showring to exacerbate the pain; providing felony level penalties for those convicted of violating the HPA, and eliminating the current industry self-policing scheme, replacing it with federally licensed USDA inspectors.

But despite the bill first being [introduced in 2012 by retired U.S. Rep. Ed Whitfield, R-Hopkinsville, and passing the House in 2019](#), the bill still faces [opposition from every single major group](#) in the walking horse world which continues to prevent the measure from clearing the Senate. It's a political science lesson on what happens when key stakeholders aren't given the opportunity to have input in legislation that affects them. Despite our view that [PAST would help the breed flourish](#), many stakeholders and a few key Senators believe that PAST as written would destroy the walking horse show circuit.

Make no mistake, we continue to support PAST, but the last decade has demonstrated that enactment over the objections of a powerful sectional group of Senators is unlikely. In light of that circumstance, [we worked with leaders in the walking horse breed in 2020 to make revisions to the bill](#) that would achieve buy-in from the breed organizations. The revisions would still eliminate the ankle chains and provide felony penalties as PAST does, but allow a smaller, removable shoe used by other breeds like the [American Saddlebred to remain](#). The revisions would give USDA enforcement authority and set up a supporting enforcement program that would leave the walking horse breed with a voice and minority stake in these supplementary enforcement programs.

The compromise we negotiated in 2020 went even further than PAST by ending the use of [treacherous devices known as tail braces](#) that hold the horse's tail in a U-shaped position after the ligaments in the tail have been severed — all for a certain prized “look.” The PAST revisions effectively marry the bill with alternative legislation introduced by Senators from Tennessee and U.S. Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell in the Upper Chamber, and others from Tennessee in the House, the [Protecting Horses from Soring Act](#).

[Some animal groups opposed revisions to PAST](#) and are pushing a [failed 2017-era USDA regulation](#) that faces a very long pathway, certain legal challenges, and potential reversal in any new administration. Rather than banking on that uncertainty, Congress can and should deliver comprehensive reform with [compromise legislation](#).

Banging our heads against the wall does nothing to stop horse slaughter or soring. We need Congress to pass meaningful, durable, enforceable reforms to protect the horses we all care so deeply about.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C.

<https://www.kentucky.com/opinion/op-ed/article261736512.html>



Federal Funding for 2022 Includes Big Wins for Horses

The omnibus signed into law last week provides record breaking \$3 million in funding for enforcement of the Horse Protection Act and more

BY MARTY IRBY

Posted Sat, Mar 19, 2022 at 11:17 am ET



A Tennessee Walking Horse performs the abusive and artificial pain-based 'Big Lick' gait created by the practice of soring. The Horse Protection Act seeks to stamp out (Photo Credit: Bradley Dick)

The workings of the 117th Congress have been discombobulated by real world circumstances, most notably by the violence of January 6, 2021, and the persistence and variations in the COVID-19 virus. But like "death and taxes," there's one thing that both humans and horses alike can count on: Congressional appropriations, the annual spending bills required to be enacted each year in some form to continue funding the federal government. Numerous programs are included that provide us with an opportunity to benefit equine welfare and the horses we all care so deeply about.

For the first time in some years, the Congress passed a new "omnibus" appropriations bill this month to fund the federal government for Fiscal Year 2022, not just renewing and slightly tweaking the prior year's offering.

Each year, Animal Wellness Action (AWA) works from office to office—all 535 of them in Congress—to submit requests to appropriators for the provisions and funding we're advocating for. In many instances, appropriators automatically adopted the provisions we support, and in some instances, we had to work diligently in a relentless pursuit to pass committee and floor amendments to secure more obscure or controversial funding from Congress.

With the enactment of the omnibus in the past week and the provisions now signed into law, we've provided a breakdown of the provisions we've lobbied hard to secure.

U.S. Dept. of Agriculture (USDA):

Language to maintain the de facto ban on horse slaughter through defunding the inspection of horse slaughter plants has now become an automatic, with both the House and Senate bills containing the defund language that keeps horse meat off the table. We worked for many years embattled in controversy on this issue, but the tide has turned in the past year due to our work with equine industry groups like The Jockey Club, The Breeders' Cup, Team Valor, the New York Racing Association, The Stronach Group, the National Thoroughbred Racing Association, West Point Thoroughbreds, Crawford Farms, the U.S. Harness Racing Alumni Association, and others [taking firm positions against the slaughter of our iconic American equines](#). We give thanks to Staci and Arthur Hancock of Stone Farm for their decades of leadership in pressing the horse racing industry to support efforts to end horse slaughter.

The final FY22 spending package also provides \$3 million for the [Pet and Women Safety \(PAWS\) Act's](#) shelter program, which directs the Secretary of Agriculture to continue coordinating with other federal agencies to efficiently implement the grant program for providing emergency and transitional shelter options for domestic violence survivors with companion animals, that provides some relief for victims with equines as well.

And as always, [AWA has made funding for enforcement of the Horse Protection Act \(HPA\)](#) to end soring a very high priority and worked

with leaders in the Tennessee Walking Horse breed to secure just over \$3 million in HPA funding for FY 2022. That's a record-breaking amount of funding that had never been above \$705,000 annually until AWA started pressing for more funding when we opened shop in 2018, and well above the \$2 million [provided for in 2021](#) and \$1 million provided for in 2020, a steady increase each year. Also secured: \$300,000 allocated for USDA to "begin utilizing swabbing for prohibited substances and other science-based inspection methods, radiology, and other objective measures as part of its horse soring inspection protocol," a request made by Reps. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn., Ron Estes, R-Kan., Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., Hal Rogers, R-Ky., John Rose, R-Tenn., and Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala., at the urging of AWA and leaders in the walking horse breed.

U.S. Dept. of Justice (DOJ):

The FY22 spending package also includes language pressing the DOJ for "vigorous enforcement of the Federal animal fighting statutes" and "other laws related to animal welfare crime," which includes the Horse Protection Act. This will help the DOJ take on soring related cases and prosecute them to the fullest extent of the law. In 52 years since the HPA was enacted not a single violator has ever gone to prison for soring Tennessee Walking Horses, and this language can be a game changer in that regard.

There's also language directing the DOJ to explore the possibility of creating the Animal Cruelty Crimes Unit to help better enforce the Horse Protection Act and other animal cruelty laws that our 2019 and 2020 House floor funding amendments sought to achieve. We extend thanks to the Senate Subcommittee's leaders, Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., and Jerry Moran, R-Kan., for leading the charge on this important issue.

U.S. Dept. of Interior (DOI) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM):

Right in line with the AWA-conceived [PZP amendment we ran in the House in 2020](#), both the House and Senate appropriations packages now contain include \$11 million for "research on reversible immunocontraceptive fertility control and its administration." This important funding will help prevent the birth of foals who would be

subject to [roundup with mass helicopter chases](#) by the Bureau of Land Management's Wild Horse and Burro Program staff and contractors who we've seen treat the roundups like their own private rodeos over the past year. More wild horses and burros have been rounded up and incarcerated under President Biden's Administration in the past year than any other President in U.S. history. But we're grateful Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn., and Rep. Dina Titus, D-Nevada, have been tireless champions for the implementation of PZP, and championed this provision, and applaud them.

Unfortunately, once again we see that other animal organizations such as the Humane Society of the U.S., Humane Society Legislative Fund, and ASPCA have provided political support to ranching interests and the BLM to secure tens of millions more in federal dollars for roundups and removals of tens of thousands of wild horses and burros – consistent with their support for the misguided "[Path Forward](#)" agreement with the National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

This program is vacuuming up horses from the West and subverting the original purposes of the Wild and Free-Roaming Horse and Burros Act of 1971. Our iconic wild horses and burros on federal lands continue to face this serious threat that will be further exposed in the upcoming documentary Wild Beauty: Mustang Spirit of the West, produced by Disney Director Ashley Avis that features team members from Animal Wellness Action.

We are so grateful to you – the readers of Patch.com who continue to take action and contact your Members of Congress asking them to support these provisions and we will keep pressing forward to ensure they remain a priority of the Congressional agenda going forward. You are each making a tremendous difference for the horses, and we will continue to be [your animal protection resource on Capitol Hill](#).

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and a former 8-time world champion equestrian who was honored by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, II for his work to protect horses. Follow him on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram @MartyIrby](#).

<https://patch.com/district-columbia/washingtondc/federal-funding-2022-includes-big-wins-horses-nodx>

TENNESSEE | LOOKOUT

Commentary: Sabotage of anti-cruelty legislation by animal rights leaders

It's showtime in Shelbyville, but political action means Tennessee Walking Horses are still subjected to cruel training techniques

BY: [MARTY IRBY](#) - SEPTEMBER 3, 2021 5:46 PM

It's showtime again in Shelbyville, a phrase you'll likely hear announcer Mark Farrar shout at the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration that's set to crown its 83rd World Grand Champion (WGC) on Saturday night. The 2021 World Grand Championship will likely be won by one of the two contenders who captured the preliminary World Championships last Saturday – Rodney Dick and 'Really Coach' or Tyler Baucom and 'Minor Ordeal.'

But unfortunately, many of the trainers competing in the event [have long records of violating the Horse Protection Act \(HPA\)](#) that was designed to stamp out the painful practice of soring – the intentional infliction of pain to horses' feet and legs by applying caustic chemicals such as kerosene, mustard

oil, or other caustic substances or by inserting sharp objects into the horses' hooves to induce an artificial high step known as the "Big Lick."

The Big Lick is quite a different look than that performed by the first World Grand Champion, Strolling Jim, crowned in 1939, who wore nothing more than a regular pair of horseshoes on his front feet, and exhibited the sound, smooth, natural gait that made the walking horse famous. But for decades, every World Grand Champion has been allowed to show and compete with large-stacked shoes as tall as 8-10 inches on their feet, and metal ankle chains around their pasterns – devices used to exacerbate the pain caused by soring.

And 2021 would have been the last Celebration in history where the large-stacked shoes and ankle chains were worn if it weren't for the Humane Society of the U.S. (HSUS) and Humane Society Legislative Fund (HSLF) whose leaders intentionally torpedoed an effort to enact anti-soring legislation because the compromise didn't mirror all the provisions of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act. That bill failed to win support for nine straight years, and there's no chance of that changing anytime soon.

The compromise – hard fought, with leaders of the Walking Horse industry finally assenting to change their ways – would eliminate chains on the horses' ankles and require a dramatic reduction in the size of the stack shoes that make Walking Horse shows look medieval. The measure also makes soring a federal felony, ends a self-policing scheme, and bans using tail braces that hold the horses' tail in a U-shaped position after the ligaments have been severed – all for a certain look.

Leaders at Animal Wellness Action have worked to enact the PAST Act since 2012 when it was first introduced in the U.S. House. We like its provisions, but the bill cannot pass in its current form. You legislate based not on your hopes, but by counting votes and understanding where legislative roadblocks exist.

It's Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration time in Tennessee but efforts to enact legislation to ban anti-cruelty techniques like soring have been torpedoed by leaders of the Human Society of the United States.

The PAST Act [only achieved passage through the House in July of 2019](#) as result of changing the bill's name to the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial PAST Act to honor the late Senator who authored the HPA and passed away in 2018. This was a strategy we developed with the Tydings family and the [Citizens' Campaign Against Big Lick Animal Cruelty](#) – not the HSUS or HSLF. The measure – led by the two veterinarians in Congress at the time – Reps. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore., and Ted Yoho, R-Fla. – cleared the House [by a vote of 333 to 96](#), but with opposition from Senators who hailed from Tennessee and Kentucky and 96 House Republicans opposing it, the bill was dead on arrival in the Upper Chamber. In light of that circumstance [we pulled together representatives still involved in the breed](#) to form those revisions to the PAST Act that would have ensured the bill became law. Had it been enacted at the end of 2020; it would have taken effect this November.

The House and Senate have the votes to pass the PAST Act, but almost every animal bill has to secure consensus in the Senate to pass, and we don't have that on the PAST Act. In light of that political reality, we at Animal Wellness Action sat down with the industry and worked to secure a compromise that finally would end horse soring in America. The Horse Protection Act of 1970, which was a monumental achievement more than a half century ago, has proved too weak to stop soring. That's why we need a fortification of the law that can be enacted, so we can finally end soring.

The compromise effort garnered support from [Monty Roberts, “the Man Who Listens to Horses;”](#) Mark Miller, the lead singer of the band Sawyer Brown who used to own walking horses; [the family of former Joseph Tydings](#), who was the author of the Horse Protection Act in 1970; SPCA International;

and [dozens of equine and animal protection groups](#). And the effort was building steam until HSUS and HSLF decided to act as obstructionists and allow the current inhumane soring practices to fester.

While the old PAST Act has been reintroduced this year by Sens. Mike Crapo, R-Ida., and Mark Warner, D-Va., it's simply a messaging bill at this stage in the game, blocked by a handful of Senators from the region where soring occurs most, and there's no end in sight.

The sabotaging of the solid compromise legislation in 2020 is regrettable, but we hope that stakeholders will come together and work through the differences to make changes that will enable the bill to clear the Senate and become law. The Humane Society's opposition to compromise has only insured one thing: horses will continue to be sored indefinitely.



Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and an eight-time World Champion equestrian who was named as one of The Hill's Top Lobbyists for 2019 and 2020, and was recently honored by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, II for his work to protect horses. Follow him on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook @MartyIrby.

<https://tennesseelookout.com/2021/09/03/commentary-sabotage-of-anti-cruelty-legislation-by-animal-rights-leaders/>

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Compromise is vital for passing legislation to end painful horse soring | Opinion

Soring must stop, and there must be real penalties — not the current weak penalties that no U.S. attorney will enforce — attached to the crimes.

Marty Irby Guest columnist

Published 6:00 p.m. CT July 9, 2021

- Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., was named as one of The Hill's Top Lobbyists for 2019 and 2020 and was honored by Queen Elizabeth II for his work to protect horses.

I've just returned to our nation's capital after a fantastic trip to California to spend time with my friend Monty Roberts, known as "The Man Who Listens to Horses." There, I witnessed some of the most amazing communication between humans and animals I've ever seen. Monty was kind enough to ask me; [Ashley Avis](#), the director of Disney's new "Black Beauty" film; and Jamie Jennings, a world-class horse trainer from Oklahoma, to lead the conversation as trailblazers at "[The Movement 2021](#)" held at Flag Is Up Farms, where Monty has lived and worked since the 1960s.



Citizens' Campaign Against Big Lick Animal Cruelty Advocates Protest At Columbia "Big Lick" Tennessee Walking Horse Show | Submitted

My introduction to humane training

You may have heard of Monty or recognize his "Join-Up " technique, a communication system between horses and humans in which the human utilizes the horses' language of "Equus" to converse. It's a dance of sorts that I first witnessed back when we became friends 16 years ago in Shelbyville. Monty had come to visit us in 2005 at Waterfall Farms, owned by William B. Johnson, my mentor and the founder of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company.

I was deeply embedded in the world of Tennessee Walking Horses, and the trainers in the state have unfortunately been prone to use an abusive practice called soring, the intentional infliction of pain to horses' limbs by applying caustic chemicals such as mustard oil, croton oil and other abrasive products to make the horse lift its leg higher and perform an artificial gait known as the "Big Lick."



Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall and Queen Elizabeth II attend a horse whispering demonstration by Brooke Global Ambassador Monty Roberts at the Royal Mews, Buckingham Palace on October 21, 2015 in London, England. The Brooke is an international animal welfare charity working to improve the lives of horses, donkeys and mules. Getty

The Prevent All Soring Tactics Act

Monty and I met serious resistance from the trainers who wondered what the magic was that Roberts brought to share. After years of trying to effectuate change in the breed and promote Monty's use of nonviolent training principles, I finally spoke out in 2013 and publicly endorsed legislation — the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act, an amendment to the Horse Protection Act — to end soring. That bill was written to eliminate the use of large, stacked shoes and ankle chains that exacerbate the pain of sored horses; increase the penalties for those caught soring to a felony; and wipe out the industry's failed self-policing program, which the U.S. Department of Agriculture's inspector general deemed corrupt and ineffective.



Horse shoes are shown during a news conference, ahead of a House vote on a bill that would prevent Soring in training Tennessee Walking horses on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday, July 24, 2019. (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana) Jose Luis Magana, AP

We spent the next six years working to get the bill passed in the U.S. House, and achieved that goal in 2019 only as result of changing the bill's name to the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial PAST Act to honor the late Joe Tydings, who authored the HPA in 1970 and passed away in 2018. The measure cleared the House by a vote of 333 to 96, but with opposition from 96 Republicans, it was dead on arrival in the Senate. With that in mind, we pulled together representatives from the breed to form a compromise that the Senate could pass. In working with walking horse leaders, I was mindful that Monty often says, "The most important word in the English language is compromise."

After hundreds of hours on the phone with industry insiders, we issued a draft of the compromise to the senators and several equine and animal protection groups. The revised legislation still banned the chains but allowed for a much

smaller and removable shoe, and it still increased the penalties, eliminated the self-policing and went further than the original PAST Act to end the use of treacherous devices known as tail braces that hold the horse's tail in a U-shaped position after the ligaments in the tail have been severed — all for a certain look.

We garnered support for revisions to PAST from Monty; Mark Miller, the lead singer of the band Sawyer Brown and who used to own walking horses; the Citizens' Campaign Against Big Lick Animal Cruelty; the Tydings family; SPCA International; and many others, and were building steam until we saw opposition from some animal groups that, despite no reasonable pathway for enactment of the PAST Act, clung to the original bill.

Make changes to the PAST Act

That compromise would have taken effect this November but for the obstructionism of a few. While the sabotaging of a worthy compromise is regrettable, there may be another shot. Sens. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, and Mark Warner, D-Virginia, have reintroduced the original PAST Act, and it's our hope that they recognize there's a pathway to get something meaningful done by making changes to it.

Continuing to reintroduce the same measure when it cannot pass does no service to the horses. Soring must stop, and there must be real penalties — not the current weak penalties that no U.S. attorney will enforce — attached to the crimes. On every bill I've worked to get signed into law, I've yet to see legislation enacted in its original form. That's the way the founders of the country designed the system to work.

The groups that opposed the revised PAST Act are pushing a failed 2017-era U.S.D.A. regulation that faces a very long pathway, a certain legal challenge and a potential reversal in a new administration. Rather than banking on that uncertainty, Congress can and should act to deliver comprehensive reform with compromise legislation.

Just banging your head against the wall does nothing to stop horse soring. We need meaningful, durable, enforceable reforms for the horses we all care so deeply about.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., was named as one of The Hill's Top Lobbyists for 2019 and 2020, and was honored by Queen Elizabeth II for his work to protect horses. Follow him on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook @MartyIrby.

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/2021/07/09/compromise-vital-passing-legislation-end-horse-soring/7908919002/>



Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration Allows Convicted Horse Abuser Jackie McConnell to Return While Reform Efforts Continue to Fail

September 10, 2021

“Allowing McConnell to return is a disgrace that has given both the Celebration and Governor Bill Lee, who attended the event on Saturday night, another black eye.”

By Marty Irby

“I’ll be honest with you, we’ll never get there,” [said David L. Howard](#) – then a board director at the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration (Celebration) – speaking just after the sentencing of one Jackie McConnell in 2012, following his conviction for felony-level crimes and horse abuse.

While I was no fan of Howard, I must say that in 2021, his words about ending soring – the intentional infliction of pain to Tennessee Walking Horses’ legs and feet by applying caustic chemicals such as kerosene and mustard oil to the skin or inserting sharp objects in the hooves to produce a pain-based gait known as the “Big Lick” — continue to ring true.

But Howard wasn’t the only member of the old guard that shared that pessimistic sentiment. Walt Chism, the current registrar, and past president at the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders’ & Exhibitors’ Association (TWHBEA), once said to me, “You’ll never stop soring.” When I asked why, he replied: “Because it works.”



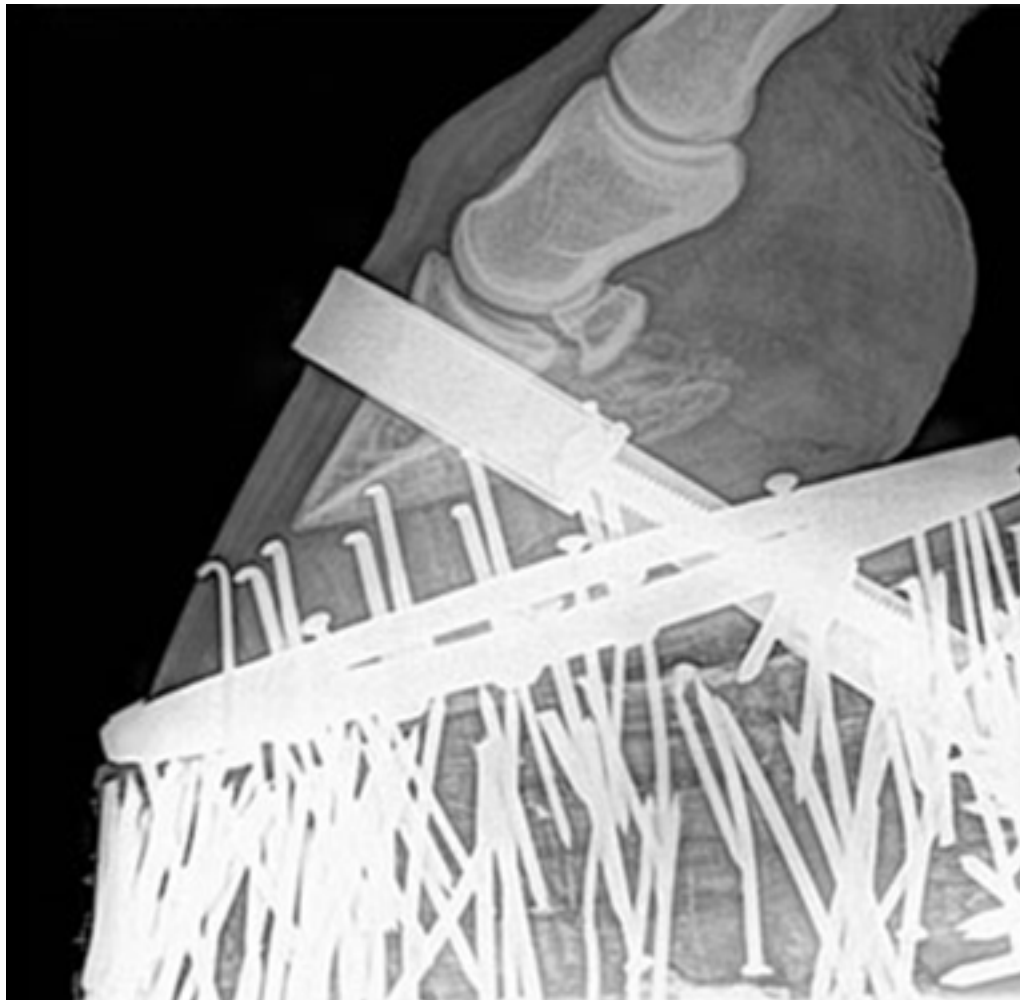
Tennessee Walking Horses perform the ‘big lick’ at the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration in Shelbyville, Tennessee. Photo courtesy of Animal Wellness Action.

And after nine years of pressing for the enactment of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, a failed Obama-era U.S. Department of Agriculture regulation, and [a potential compromise](#) to end the practice of soring that was defeated last Fall, things in the walking horse industry only seem to be digressing.

If you recall [Jackie McConnell](#), you'll be reminded of the ABC Nightline expose that my colleague, Wayne Pacelle, authored. [Pacelle's investigation showed McConnell brutally beating, stewarding, and soring numerous horses, and shocking them in the head with a cattle prod.](#)

In May of 2012, when the story broke, I was in the most difficult position I'd ever encountered as the current president of TWHBEA. McConnell was one of the top world grand champion trainers, and ABC exposed the most gruesome actions I'd ever seen.

My phone buzzed with tons of calls, emails, and questions from reporters, and I knew the Tennessee Walking Horse would never be the same. Many of us reformers in the breed saw a light at the end of the dark abyss we had wanted to change for years. And every major walking horse industry organization banned McConnell from participating in events and the breed for life – [including the Celebration](#).



X-Ray of the 'stacked shoe' utilized to produce the 'big lick' in Tennessee Walking Horses. Photo Credit courtesy of the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture.

I asked if Pacelle would be willing to come and meet with us, and that August, he joined me and TWHBEA executive director Ron Thomas in Smyrna, Tennessee for a discussion on soring, the expose, and the future of the breed. We decided to band together to end soring for good, and the long-term result of that alliance is the formation of [Animal Wellness Action](#) (AWA) where Pacelle and I both work today, still fighting to end the scourge that's marred the breed since the 1960's.

Not long after the formation of AWA in 2018, we joined forces with the [Citizens' Campaign Against Big Lick Animal Cruelty \(CCABLAC\)](#) led by [Clant M. Seay](#), and the family of the late U.S. Senator Joe Tydings, who authored the Horse Protection Act (HPA) of 1970. The strategy we developed saw the U.S. House of Representatives finally pass the renamed PAST Act – the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act – by a vote of 333 to 96 in July of 2019.



Members of the team that passed the PAST Act through the U.S. House in 2019 at a press conference on Capitol Hill, Left to right: Penny Eastman, Meredith Hou, Marty Irby, Clant M. Seay, Holly Gann, Wayne Pacelle, Gina Garey, and Jennifer Skiff. Photo courtesy of Animal Wellness Action.

But in the Senate, almost every animal bill has to secure Unanimous Consent, a target we can't hit as long as Senators from Tennessee and Kentucky continue to oppose the PAST Act. In light of that political reality, we sat down with leaders within the breed, and worked to forge a compromise that would end soring for good. The HPA has proved too weak, and we need fortification of the law so we can finally end this cruelty.

The compromise effort garnered support from [Monty Roberts, “The Man Who Listens to Horses,” the Tydings’ family](#), SPCA International, and dozens of equine and animal protection groups. The effort-built steam but failed to secure the support of Sen. Mark Warner, D-Va. – one of the PAST Act’s lead sponsors – before the end of the Congress last December, and the compromise was not brought forward for a vote in the Senate.

While the old PAST Act was reintroduced again this year by Sens. Mike Crapo, R-Ida., and Warner, it’s simply a messaging bill at this stage in the game and will continue to be blocked with no end in sight.

Now, with nearly all efforts exhausted to reform the breed, [and amidst protests of the Big Lick at the Celebration, Jackie McConnell has returned to the event in 2021, according to BillyGoBoy.com](#). Allowing McConnell to return is a disgrace that has given both the Celebration and Governor Bill Lee, who attended the event on Saturday night, another black eye. The Celebration should uphold its lifetime ban on McConnell and go further to ban the use of large-stacked shoes and ankle chains, that have perpetuated the six-decade-long scourge of soring, at the event. As one of the largest USDA certified inspection programs in the breed, the Celebration’s SHOW HIO has the power to eradicate these gruesome devices and prevent abusers like McConnell from attending their event.



Far right: Jackie McConnell at the 2021 Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration. Photo by Clant M. Seay, BillyGoBoy.com.

The failure of our compromise to be enacted last year is regrettable, but we hope that stakeholders, as well as Members of the House and Senate will come together, put the welfare of the horse first, and work to secure meaningful reforms. Until then, horses will continue to be sore indefinitely.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and former president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association who was honored in 2020 by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, II for his work to end soring. Follow him on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#) @MartyIrby.

<https://www.horsenation.com/2021/09/10/tennessee-walking-horse-national-celebration-allows-convicted-horse-abuser-jackie-mcconnell-to-return-while-reform-efforts-continue-to-fail/>



PAST Act Reintroduced following Non-Violent Horsemanship Event

Animal Wellness Action and Others Advocate for Compromise Effort that Can Secure Meaningful Reforms in the American Show Horse World

BY MARTY IRBY

Posted Thu, Jun 24, 2021 at 6:00 pm ET



Left to Right: Marty Irby, Monty Roberts, and Ashley Avis at Flag Is Up Farms on June 17, 2021 at The Movement 2021. (Photo: Animal Wellness Action)

I've just returned to our Nation's Capital after a fantastic trip to the Central Coast of California to spend time with my friend Monty Roberts – "the Man Who Listens to Horses." There, I witnessed some of the most amazing communication between humans and animals I've ever seen. Monty was kind enough to ask me, [Ashley Avis](#) (the director of Disney's new Black Beauty film), and Jamie Jennings (a world class horse trainer who joined me last year in receiving an [award of recognition from Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, II](#) for our work to protect horses) to lead the conversation as trailblazers at his signature event – [The Movement 2021](#) – held on Monty's Flag Is Up Farms, where he's lived and worked since the 1960's.

Many of you may have heard of [Monty or recognize his work to Join-Up®](#) with horses of all kinds – a communication between horses and

humans, where the human utilizes the horses' language of "Equus" to converse. It's a dance of sorts that I first witnessed back when we became friends some 16 years ago in Shelbyville, Tennessee. Monty had come to visit us at Waterfall Farms in 2005, where my first job out of college was working for the founder of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, LLC, and my mentor, [William B. Johnson](#).

I was deeply embedded in the world of Tennessee Walking Horses, and the trainers in that breed have unfortunately been prone to use an abusive training method called soring, the intentional infliction of pain to horses' front limbs by applying caustic chemicals such as mustard oil, diesel fuel, kerosene, croton oil, and other abrasive products to make the horse lift its leg higher and perform an artificial, pain-based gait known as the "Big Lick" that's prized among some trainers, owners, and judges in Tennessee and Kentucky.

Back then Monty and I met some serious resistance from the walking horse trainers who wondered what the magic was that Monty Roberts brought to share – the use of nonviolent training and natural horsemanship principles. And after years of trying to effectuate change in the breed, and promote Monty's principles, I finally [spoke out and publicly endorsed federal legislation to end soring in 2013 – an amendment to the Horse Protection Act \(HPA\) of 1970, the Prevent All Soring Tactics \(PAST\) Act](#). That bill was written to eliminate the use of large, stacked shoes and ankle chains that exacerbate the pain of sored horses, increase the penalties for those caught soring to felony level enforcement, and wipe out the industry's failed self-policing program the USDA's own Office of Inspector General in 2010 deemed corrupt and ineffective.

We spent the next six years working to get the bill passed in the U.S. House of Representatives, and [only achieved that goal in 2019 as result of changing the bill's name to the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial PAST Act](#) to honor another friend – the late Joe Tydings, a Democrat for Maryland who authored the HPA in 1970 and passed away in 2018. The measure cleared the U.S. House by a vote of 333 to 96, but with opposition from Senators who hailed from Tennessee and Kentucky, the bill was dead on arrival in the Upper

Chamber, something we'd long expected. With that in mind, in 2020 we pulled together representatives still involved in the breed to form a compromise bill that the Senate would pass. In working with colleagues at AWA and with leaders of the Walking Horse industry, I was mindful that Monty often says, "the most important word in the English language is compromise."

And after eighteen grueling months and hundreds of hours on the phone with the industry insiders, we issued a draft of the compromise bill to the Senators and several equine and animal protection groups. The revised PAST Act still banned the chains but allowed for a much smaller and removable shoe (about sixty percent less in size than those used today), and it still increased the penalties, eliminated the self-policing scheme, and even went further than the original PAST Act to ban the use of treacherous devices known as tail braces that hold the horses tail in a U-shaped position after the ligaments in the tail have been severed – all for a certain look.

We garnered support for revisions to the PAST Act from [Monty](#); Mark Miller – the lead singer of the band Sawyer Brown who used to own walking horses; the [Citizens' Campaign Against Big Lick Animal Cruelty](#); the [family of Joe Tydings](#); SPCA International; NYCLASS; and many other horse and animal related groups. We were building steam [until we saw opposition from some animal groups](#) which, despite no reasonable pathway for enactment of the legislation in the Senate, opposed the compromise and clung to the original bill. That bill would have taken effect in November to ban ankle chains and tail braces and dramatically reduce the size the shoes but for the obstructionism of a few.

While the sabotaging of a worthy compromise is regrettable, there may be another shot at it. Sens. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, and Mark Warner, D-Virginia, have today, reintroduced the original PAST Act, and it's our hope that they recognize that there is a pathway to get something meaningful done by making some compromises to the measure. AWA supported the original PAST Act for years, but it faced insurmountable opposition from key lawmakers.

Just continuing to reintroduce the same measure in the Senate when it cannot move in that chamber does no service to the horses. Soring must stop, and there must be real penalties attached to the crimes, not the 1970 misdemeanor penalties that no U.S. Attorney will actively enforce. And on every bill in every subject area, I've worked to get a measure signed into law, I've yet to see legislation ever enacted in its original form. That's the way the founders of the country designed the system to work.

Rather than bank on a failed USDA regulation the groups that opposed the compromise are pushing that faces a very long pathway, a certain legal challenge, and a potential reversal in a new Administration, Congress can and should act and deliver comprehensive reform.

[Sign the petition by clicking here to urge action on practical reform for horses.](#) Just banging your head against the wall does nothing to stop horse soring. We need meaningful, durable, enforceable reforms for the horses we all care so deeply about.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., who was named as one of The Hill's Top Lobbyists for 2019 and 2020, and was [recently honored by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, II](#) for his work to protect horses. Follow him on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#) @MartyIrby.

<https://patch.com/district-columbia/washingtondc/past-act-reintroduced-following-non-violent-horsemanship-event-nodx>



Big Lick Animal Cruelty: Oliver Potts & USDA's Regulatory Debacle

This fourth piece in a multi-part series on the soring of show horses tells how we 'burned the midnight' oil trying to finalize USDA rules

BY MARTY IRBY

Posted Wed, Mar 10, 2021 at 4:03 pm ET



Large, stacked shoes and ankle chains placed on horses feet to exacerbate pain caused by chemical cooked into the skin with saran wrap (Photo credit: U.S. Dept. of Agriculture and Blount County, Tenn., sheriff's office taken at the barn of Larry Wheelon in East Tennessee)

Last week I shared the story of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act's failure in 2014, and the ultimate passage of the renamed U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial PAST Act in 2019, H.R. 693. And while I briefly touched on the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture's failed anti-

soring regulations, you may have wondered what occurred in the five-year span leading up to the Tydings' PAST Act's passage in the House. On July 31, 2014, when I learned House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio had caved-in to political pressure from the pro-soring coalition and refused to advance the PAST Act to a vote, I knew we must find a different path forward to end soring. Still working in Congress, I consulted with my now-colleague, Wayne Pacelle, and we devised a strategy to advance USDA regulations to ban the use of the large-stacked shoes and ankle chains placed on horses' feet in the show ring to exacerbate pain caused from soring and eliminate the industry's failed self-policing program. Two of the three main components the proposed PAST Act would have mandated by statute.

I had long known that the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture had published a statement in the Federal Register in April of 1979 – just a few months before I was born – that if soring persisted USDA would consider removing the stacked-shoes and ankle chains. Horse advocates had made attempts to achieve that end in 1988 with a judicial mandate that ultimately led to the reduction of the size of the shoes and chains instead of elimination, and again in 2012 when USDA listening sessions were held in Texas, Tennessee, Kentucky, California, and Maryland on the proposed regulations. Ultimately, both attempts failed, and not much changed in the way of soring practices.

But in the wake of Boehner's decision, I saw a window of opportunity to achieve regulatory reform and convinced U.S. Reps. Ed Whitfield, R-Ky., and Steve Cohen, D-Tenn. to lead a Congressional sign-on letter that garnered 166 bipartisan Members of the House to Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack urging him to enact regulations to end soring. Whitfield and I pressed Vilsack for weeks and ultimately secured a direct discussion with the Secretary in August of 2014. We were both quite surprised to learn of Vilsack's knowledge on the subject of soring, and willingness to work with us. In the meantime, Wayne directed litigation specialists at his disposal to press the White House and Administration for federal rulemaking on the issue, and we were off and running.

We spent the better part of the next two-years working to achieve those regulations and faced many setbacks along the way. Initially, attorneys at USDA who drafted the regulations failed miserably in their first attempt by applying the language to "other related breeds" which set off a firestorm of fury within the American Saddlebred world and American Horse Council. Veterinarian Reps. Ted Yoho, R-Fla., a large animal equine vet, and Kurt Schrader, D-Oregon, were then joined by more than 150 Members of the House in asking Vilsack to clarify the language and ensure it only applied to Tennessee Walking, Racking, and Spotted Saddle Horses – the three breeds who had proven histories of soring abuse. The language clarifications cost us precious time and the clock was ticking fast as Vilsack's term in office and the Obama Administration was quickly coming to a close.

In the final months of 2016, the U.S. Senators from Tennessee and Kentucky pressed Vilsack for further extension of a comment period on the regulations in an effort to stall our work, and Vilsack granted their wish. I spoke directly with Secretary Vilsack following that action and he conveyed to me that he granted the extension to keep "the boys on the Hill happy," but that he promised to get the anti-soring regulations done before he left office – and he kept his word. On the very last afternoon President Obama's longest-serving cabinet member held office, Tom Vilsack announced the finalization of the USDA regulations to ban large-stacked shoes and ankle chains in the show ring and eliminate the industry's corrupt inspection scheme. A monumental day in the history of soring – or so we thought.

A few days later – ironically enough I happened to be at lunch with former U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings the moment some tragic news came – we learned the Director of the Federal Register, Oliver Potts, sternly refused to publish Vilsack's regulations in the Federal Register, preventing them from becoming official. Tydings and I were together that day as we prepared to honor him with an award at the National Press Club for his half a century of work on the issue of soring.

And while colleagues who weren't well-versed in the processes of the Federal Register were celebrating the regulations with cake and

champagne in Gaithersburg, MD, U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen, myself, Wayne, Whitfield, and Priscilla Presley all "burned the midnight oil" pressing Potts to reconsider. We went as far as reaching the Directors of the Whitehouse Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and Office of Personnel Management (OPM), along with the head of the Government Printing Office (GPO) and attempted to get the Federal Register published on Inauguration Day for the first time in American history. We even reached Vice-President Joe Biden's office, but with only hours left in the Obama Administration, our efforts failed and President Trump's Administration rolled-back the unpublished anti-soring regulations in a one-two punch.

Once again, in keeping with the six-decade-long trend, our effort was obliterated, and the pro-soring coalition dodged a speeding bullet that would have led to the death of the "big lick" animal cruelty. It was an unfortunate series of events and to this day, I am convinced there is something we don't know about Oliver Potts and soring, and [he remains the Director of the Federal Register today.](#)

I'll be back in touch next week with more insight on where we are in 2021 on the issue of soring, and how the landscape for both regulations; corporate reform that could be achieved by the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association, and Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration; and a potential revised PAST Act looks ahead. In the meantime [click here to take action](#) and tell USDA's APHIS Administrator Kevin Shea to crack down on soring at the upcoming "Heart of Dixie Showcase" in Philadelphia, MS this Saturday.

Marty Irby is a former 8-time world champion equestrian who currently serves as executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and was [recently honored by Her Majesty](#), Queen Elizabeth, II for his work to protect horses. Follow him on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook](#) @MartyIrby



Horse Shows Where 'Big Lick' Abuse Runs Rampant Begin Soon

Tennessee Walking Horses need your help to end 'soring' and the artificial high step known as the 'big lick' prized in the Southeastern U.S.

BY MARTY IRBY

Posted Mon, Feb 15, 2021 at 8:11 pm ET



Large, stacked horseshoes and ankle chains placed on Tennessee Walking Horses feet to exacerbate pain to produce the "big lick." (Photo Credit: Bradley Dick)

A [New York Times headline](#) on September 4, 2006, read "Horse Show Ends in Uproar Over U.S.D.A Inspections" reporting on the failure of the judges at the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration to crown a World Grand Champion in Shelbyville, Tennessee for the first time since 1939. You see, the Tennessee Walking Horse breed has been plagued by recurring abuses of the animals at the center of the enterprise – a practice known as [soring](#), the intentional infliction of pain to horses' front limbs in order to achieve an exaggerated high-stepping gait known as the "big lick."

The "big lick" can only be produced by inducing pain: trainers apply caustic chemicals such as diesel fuel, kerosene, mustard oil, and croton oil to the pasterns and skin of the horse or insert sharp objects into the horses' hooves. Abusers place large stacked-up shoes as tall as six to eight inches high, and ankle chains on the feet to exacerbate the pain. Nearly every top "trainer" in the walking horse industry has a list of violations of the Horse Protection Act that would make even the most hardened animal exploiter blush. The abuse has become systemic and the big prizes the trainers and owners seek come at the World Grand Championship event that seats about 30,000 people. It's something likened to the games of Ancient Rome held in the Colosseum or Circus Maximus, but with less than 10,000 or so in the stands these days.

The ranks of reformers pressing to end soring are swelling: Alyssa Milano, Kesha, Willie Nelson; [Monty Roberts](#), "the man who listens to horses," and his daughter Debbie Loucks; Donna Benefield, a movie producer who has performed at the Summer Olympics, and who has worked for more than 30 years to eradicate the scourge of soring; Carl Bledsoe, a former "big lick" world champion trainer who's now completely centered his life and practices around natural horsemanship; Mark Miller, the lead singer of the band Sawyer Brown who I worked with on building his walking horse bloodstock many years ago; [Ben Tydings Smith](#), whose grandfather – my late friend U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings (D-MD) – authored the Horse Protection Act of 1970; and countless others have been working on a [variety of avenues to end soring](#).

Next month, the "big lick" shows and games are set to begin again at the so-called "[Heart of Dixie Spring Showcase" in Philadelphia, Mississippi](#) amidst the Covid-19 pandemic. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has the authority to deploy federal inspectors to these shows, but they've done very little to curb the abuse for more than half a century. It's a boon for horse soring, and even trainers who've signed [consent decisions](#) related to soring are being allowed to continue showing this year: given just a slap on the wrist and a future suspension set to begin when they're ready to retire.

The horses need your help. [Please take action today by using this form by Animal Wellness Action](#) asking USDA's APHIS Administrator Kevin Shea to send inspectors to the upcoming shows and crackdown on one of the worst forms of horse abuse that endures in the United States. We can help deliver the horses from this evil.

Marty Irby is a former 8-time world champion equestrian who currently serves as executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and was [recently honored by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, II](#) for his work to protect horses. Follow him on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook @MartyIrby](#).

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[Revise the PAST Act to protect Tennessee Walking Horses, end soring | Opinion](#)

A new reform effort would revise the PAST Act to still eliminate the chains, the large shoes and the industry's self-policing program.

Monty Roberts and Marty Irby Guest columnists

Published 4:18 p.m. CT Nov. 30, 2020

Monty Roberts is a world-renowned horse trainer and bestselling author of "The Man Who Listens to Horses," and Marty Irby is the executive director of Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association who was recently recognized by Queen Elizabeth II for his life's work to end soring.

For the past 15 years, we've been working to transition the Tennessee Walking Horse, and the breed's trainers, away from the painful practice of soring — the infliction of pain to horses' feet by applying caustic chemicals such as mustard oil, croton oil and kerosene to the skin or inserting sharp objects into the hooves to create an exaggerated high step known as the "Big Lick" that's traditional in Tennessee and Kentucky.



Monty Roberts, Submitted

When the principles and methods of nonviolent training were introduced to a group of influential Walking Horse trainers in 2005 in Shelbyville, Tennessee, they were astounded to see the results achieved in a very short period of time. Given that response, we felt we owed it to the horses to press for change and create new opportunities for those who sought reform and wanted to return

the breed to its roots — the beautiful stride and head nod that come naturally and are unique to the breed.



Horseshoes are shown during a news conference, ahead of a House vote on a bill that would prevent Soring in training Tennessee Walking Horses on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday, July 24, 2019 (AP/Photo Jose Luis Magana)

Thankfully, the trail pleasure division has grown

The next year, an effort to add a new division to the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association's National Futurity for 2- and-3-year-old trail pleasure horses prevailed, and we have since continued to see growth in that segment of the breed. Despite our efforts and the continued growth of the trail pleasure division, the tough trainers in the breed continued to insist on using devices — large, stacked shoes and ankle chains used to exacerbate pain and achieve that “Big Lick” movement in the showring — that contribute to

soring. In 2006, we sat and watched the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration fail to crown a World Grand Champion for the first time since the inaugural event was held in 1939 because the majority of the contenders had been disqualified by the U.S. Department of Agriculture for soring.



Marty Irby, Submitted

When the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act was introduced in the U.S. House in 2013, we spoke out publicly in support of the measure, which would ban those terrible devices on the horses' feet and would implement serious felony-level penalties for violators. We've continued to press for enactment of the legislation, and our belief that the PAST Act will end soring has not waivered.

The political reality is that despite the bill passing the House in 2019, the measure is dead in the U.S. Senate. Given that reality, the PAST Act as written has virtually no chance of becoming law. To break the gridlock, we're advocating for a new reform effort that would revise the PAST Act to still eliminate the chains, the large shoes and the industry's self-policing program, plus upgrade felony-level penalties.

Eliminate gruesome tail braces

Collaborating with leaders in the breed, the revisions, which are still being tweaked to satisfy mainstream equine and veterinary professionals, would require more than a 50% reduction in the use of shoes, go further than the original bill to establish science-based, objective inspections, and eliminate the use of gruesome devices known as tail braces that were used on the first World Grand Champion, Strolling Jim, in 1939 and almost every winner since.



Horses and riders at rally in front of the United States Capitol, organized by the grassroots network All American Walking Horse Alliance, aiming to raise public awareness of the abusive training method known as "soring." *Jack Gruber / File / USA TODAY*

To achieve a certain look that makes the tail stand up over a horse's back, the tendons in the tail are severed, and the horses are forced to live in a contraption that maintains a full break in the tail bone. The horses are then shown in the ring with a metal U-shaped stand under the tail that's tied down extremely tightly with a shoestring, cutting off the circulation in the tail. This device's existence predates the use of the stacked shoes and chains by two decades or more and is the foundation for the use of all of the violent paraphernalia in the showring.



Responsible leaders in the Walking Horse breed now understand that foundation of artifice must be eliminated. We see a change in the hearts and minds of stakeholders, and we must stand by those who have demonstrated a desire for change. We must show them, help them and respect their good-faith support for reform.

We applaud those who are stepping up for the Tennessee Walking Horse, and we are grateful to all of the people who have joined together to finally end the scourge of soring. We firmly believe there are no bad Tennessee Walking Horses. It is only the human element that has caused the Big Lick discipline to be a bad one.

Monty Roberts is a world-renowned horse trainer and bestselling author of "The Man Who Listens to Horses," and Marty Irby is the executive director of Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association who was recently recognized by Queen Elizabeth II for his life's work to end soring.

<https://www.knoxnews.com/story/opinion/2020/11/30/revise-past-act-protect-tennessee-walking-horses-end-soring/6466117002/>



The Horse Protection Act needs updating. It requires compromise in the Senate | Opinion

Finally, after 50 years of fighting, there is a path to passage of amendments to the Horse Protection Act to end soring in America.

Benjamin Tydings Smith Guest columnist

Published 4:16 p.m. CT Dec. 18, 2020 | Updated 4:17 p.m. CT Dec. 18, 2020

- Benjamin Tydings Smith is the grandson of the late U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings, father of the Horse Protection Act.

In 1970, U.S. Sen. Howard Baker, Jr., R-Tenn., joined with my grandfather, Sen. Joseph Tydings, D-Md. to work together in a bipartisan spirit to pass

the Horse Protection Act, or HPA, with the goal of ending the scourge of “soring” that’s plagued the Tennessee walking horse breed since the 1950s.

It was 50 years ago this month that he secured that national legislation, and not just our family, but the large community of horse lovers in America is in his debt.

Now a half century old, the law needs a major tune-up. Horse soring trainers have succeeded in skirting and subverting the prohibition on the activity, applying harsh chemicals to horses’ feet, and exacerbating the pain with ankle chains hitting the tender sore skin and flesh to produce a high step called the “big lick.” My grandad spoke often about his desire to bring it to an end, and he worked on reforms after he left office in the early 1970s. Sadly, he wasn’t able to see the abuse eradicated before he passed away in 2018.

A huge step forward and a major stall



Rep. Kurt Schrader D-OR., accompanied by Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn., speaks during a news conference, ahead of a House vote on a bill that would prevent Soring in training Tennessee Walking horses on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday, July 24, 2019. (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana) *Jose Luis Magana, AP*

Knowing how much Joe Tydings cared about this issue, I picked up the torch and joined Animal Wellness Action and the Citizen's Campaign Against Big Lick Animal Cruelty, the two leading anti-soring groups in the country, to push for passage of the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics Act through the U.S. House last year. Known as the PAST Act, it was the most significant step forward for the Tennessee walking horse since the HPA was signed into law. These groups have the most sweat equity in the PAST Act, lobbying the Congress in Washington and protesting big lick shows on the ground with leaders and advocates who've risked their lives and livelihoods to end this plague.

The PAST Act has seen great support, but despite 52 cosponsors in the Senate, and 333 votes in support of the measure in the House, it has stalled

indefinitely in the Senate Commerce Committee. This was no surprise to us given the fierce opposition to reform from the senators from Tennessee and Kentucky, who actually introduced competing legislation that fails to offer any real reform.

Sens. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, and Mark Warner, D-VA, have been valiant in leading the PAST Act in the Senate. Despite their efforts, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell will not allow their bill to advance, and it stands no chance of passing.

The PAST Act needs compromise

My grandfather spoke often about compromise. He spoke often about compromise related to the HPA, and how he reached across the aisle to Baker to pass the measure and secure the very first law to protect our iconic American equines. It was a Democratic Congress and a Republican President who signed his legislation into law, and he conveyed to me that it wasn't easy, and the legislation was imperfect. He knew the measure could have done more – but he also recognized that the perfect should never be the enemy of the good, and that supporting progress for horse protection was the right thing to do. The status quo was not acceptable to Joe Tydings.

Keeping those truths in mind, the Tydings family has offered our full endorsement for revisions to the PAST Act, made in a compromise effort with leaders in the Tennessee walking horse breed. For the first time, industry leaders have agreed to legislative prohibitions to ban wrapping chains around the horses' pasterns, to dramatically reduce the shoe complex they attach to the horses' hooves, and to agree to the imposition of felony-level penalties on violators of the law. McConnell and Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., are supportive of these changes. Finally, after 50 years of fighting, there is a path to passage of amendments to the Horse Protection Act to end soring in America.

A sound future for the Tennessee walking horse

Revisions to the Horse Protection Act will secure a sound future for the Tennessee walking horse breed while protecting the horses and ensuring the breed's economic viability.



Ben Tydings Smith, submitted

We believe that eliminating the chains and action devices from the horses' feet will solve the majority of the problems related to soring, and that allowing a smaller shoe to be utilized will put the "ponies," as my grandfather referred to them, on a level and fair playing field with other show horse breeds. We believe the new language that provides a hyper-detailed inspection system makes the House-passed bill even better.

Furthermore, we are pleased to learn of the elimination of the gruesome device known as the tail brace, the ban on the possession of mustard oil, croton oil, zip ties, alligator clips, and other soring and distraction items that the House-passed PAST Act did not include.

The legislative process seldom delivers every dreamed-of provision to one side on a contentious issue and to get things done, compromise we must. If Joe Tydings were alive today – one of the last men to serve in the U.S. Calvary –

he'd be the one leading the charge for this compromise effort for reform on the Golden Anniversary of the Horse Protection Act.

Benjamin Tydings Smith is the grandson of the late U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings, father of the Horse Protection Act, who resides in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/2020/12/18/tennessee-walking-horses-soring-past-act/3931830001/>



Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Horse Protection Act

Unlikely allies come together in a historical effort to end the abusive practice of soring Tennessee Walking Horses

BY MARTY IRBY

Posted Wed, Dec 9, 2020 at 11:24 am ET



Horses run gallop in flower meadow (Shutterstock: Royalty-free stock photo ID: 576779830 | Edited by Swanson Design Group)

On December 9, 1970, President Richard M. Nixon signed into law the Horse Protection Act (HPA), the first federal law aimed at shielding horses from a distinct form of cruelty.

Just prior to the HPA's enactment, [LIFE Magazine](#), in "[Agony of the Walking Horse](#)" chronicled abuses in the subculture of a show horse industry. "Congressman William Whitehurst of Virginia has introduced a bill into the House which would stop such torture," noted the author of the expose. "Washington's most determined friend of the Walker, however, may be Maryland's Joseph D. Tydings, equestrian and senator who has introduced a similar bill in the senate."

My late friend, former [Senator Joe Tydings, D-M.D.](#), authored the Senate-passed HPA with Senator Howard Baker, a legendary

Republican from Tennessee. Like many of us at Animal Wellness Action and our affiliates, Tydings was a dedicated horseman who began riding at the tender age of four. He was a lifelong equestrian, a staunch political advocate for horse protection, and one of the very last soldiers to serve in the U.S. Calvary.

Tydings' HPA was designed to end the terrible practice of soring, the intentional infliction of pain to horses' front legs to achieve an [artificial high-stepping gait known as the "Big Lick."](#) This form of animal exploitation is still prized and rewarded by judges throughout the South especially at shows in Tennessee and Kentucky.

But sometimes the most well-intentioned designs don't take form as the architects planned. A critical first step, the HPA contained some loopholes, and key players in the industry have long exploited them, doing their best to both coerce and co-opt the USDA, which has been charged to conduct inspections at shows and stamp out soring. Near the end of Tydings' life, he explained to me the situation he found himself in working with Senator Baker seeking to pass the HPA and the need for compromise. He wanted to make the lives of the horses better, and he did compromise on the final version of the HPA, knowing the law could be improved and expanded in subsequent years.

That expansion opportunity is, very belatedly, upon us. Now, 50 years later, on this commemoration of the HPA's passage, we find ourselves in quite the same position as Senator Tydings. We have a very real chance to change the law for the better – dramatically so.

To be clear, for the past eight years, we've gone full force to pass the original [Prevent All Soring Tactics \(PAST\) Act, H.R. 693/S. 1007](#) – designed as a major upgrade to the HPA that would ban action devices and stacked shoes, eliminate the industry self-regulation program at the horse shows, and impose felony-level penalties.

While we successfully ushered the bill – renamed in early 2019 the [U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics Act – through the U.S. House by a vote of 333 to 96](#), we've had no such luck

in the Senate. The current [U.S. Senators from Tennessee](#) and Kentucky believe that the PAST Act will destroy the Tennessee Walking Horse breed and are blocking the bill, and it will remain dead on arrival in the U.S. Senate for many years to come.

While I disagree with that harsh view of the PAST Act, we've recognized, as Senator Tydings did, that the art of lawmaking is taking as much as you can get and building on that law again in the future. The Senate, shaped by the use of the filibuster as a tool for the minority to thwart legislative action, forces parties to compromise.

Animal Wellness Action has been in the thick of an effort to forge a compromise with our adversaries. Through honest and frank dialogue, we have secured an agreement from the industry to end the use of action devices and tail braces, to dramatically reduce the size and weight of the shoes affixed to the horses' forelimbs, to eliminate an industry self-regulation program for inspections, and to impose felony-level penalties on violators. That's remarkable progress that Senator Tydings would have celebrated in a full-throated way.

Tydings' grandson, [Ben Tydings Smith](#), agrees with us as well, and in fact penned a letter in October to the PAST Act's Senate sponsors Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, and Mark Warner, D-Va., that stated the following: "My grandfather spoke often about compromise. He spoke often about compromise related to the Horse Protection Act (HPA) of 1970, and how he reached across the aisle to the late U.S. Senator Howard Baker, R-Tenn., to pass the measure and secure the very first law to protect our iconic American equines – whose very backs this country was built upon. He went further, and he reached across the aisle to ensure that President Richard M. Nixon signed the bill into law, and he conveyed it wasn't easy. He knew the HPA wasn't perfect, he knew the measure could have done more – but he also recognized that the perfect should never be the enemy of the good, and that supporting progress for horse protection was the right thing to do. The status quo was not acceptable to Joe Tydings."

The HPA has only been amended once, in 1976, but that amendment actually weakened protections for the horses. It established the

industry's current incestuous, self-policing scheme deemed "corrupt" and "ineffective" in a 2010 USDA Office of Inspector General audit – the impetus for the PAST Act's introduction. It is an embarrassment for our movement that we have not been able to improve on this law in the half century for its enactment.

We should be ashamed that we haven't demonstrated the moxy in five decades to deliver reforms for horses. The critics of compromise play into the hands of the most intractable opponents of reform by attempting to stand in the way of progress. They also don't understand the political reality or challenges in trying to overpower an industry that commands strong support in a Congress almost evenly divided by Democrats and Republicans.

We are proud to stand with the Tydings family in supporting this compromise effort, and also with the Citizens' Campaign Against Big Lick Animal Cruelty. This grassroots organization that has shut down Big Lick shows across the Southeast with protests, and its founder, Clant M. Seay, was right there with us in fighting for House passage of the PAST Act. We are joined in this effort by the legendary non-violent horse trainer [Monty Roberts](#) and by dozens of humane organizations from Virginia to California.

So, as we celebrate today's Golden Anniversary of the Horse Protection Act, we also act.

The best thing we could do for Senator Tydings on this major occasion would be to strengthen the law that he toiled to secure for the horses that have served human civilization in so many ways.

Join us in honoring Joe Tydings, and the majestic horses we care so deeply about by [clicking here and asking your Senators to support this effort for reform.](#)

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and one of [The Hill's Top Lobbyists for 2019](#) who was recently [honored by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, II](#) for his life's work to end soring | Follow him on [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), and [Facebook @MartyIrby](#)

<https://patch.com/district-columbia/washingtondc/commemorating-50th-anniversary-horse-protection-act-nodx>

TENNESSEE | LOOKOUT

Commentary: When will the Tennessee Walking Horse be Unchained?

[BY MARTY IRBY](#)

OCTOBER 21, 2020 5:29 AM



Two-time World Grand Championship Tennessee Walking Horse Midnight Sun. (Photo: VisitFranklin.com)

Last month the 82nd annual Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration ended in Shelbyville. It's an event that's been brewing with controversy for more than half a century because of soring, where trainers inflict pain to horses' front feet and legs to produce an artificial exaggeration of the natural gait, the "Big Lick."

Before trainers began resorting to soring as a core strategy in the 1950s and 1960s, the Tennessee Walking Horse had been known as America's Horse and was one of the fastest growing breeds the world had ever seen, proudly ridden, and treasured by Roy Rogers, Dale Evans, John Wayne, and even President Lyndon B. Johnson. But the negative stigma of soring eventually ran off most Americans who didn't want to be associated with the abuse. I recall meeting Zsa Zsa Gabor at the Celebration as a child and sitting in her

lap watching the show, and remember Randy Owen, the lead singer of the band Alabama visiting on many occasions. Even Heavyweight Champion George Foreman once rode aboard a walking horse in Shelbyville.



Marty Irby, a former grand champion on the Tennessee Walking horse show circuit, is pictured with The Lion King following their 2006 Two-Year-Old Trail Pleasure Championship at the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association's National Futurity in Shelbyville. Lion King is a sound flat-shod horse in its natural form with no stacked shoes or ankle chains.

But today, it's such a tainted breed that it's dying on the vine. Fifteen years ago, I recognized that the breed was headed in a downward spiral due to the soring stigma and decided to try and make change. Residing in Shelbyville, I launched a successful campaign for election to the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association's (TWHBEA) board of directors and found myself on most occasions the youngest person in the room – usually by at least a decade or two. It was my

hope that from within, I could help transition the breed away from soring, end the use of large, stacked shoes and ankle chains that are rampantly utilized on the horses feet in competition to exacerbate the pain induced to the legs; and eventually return the breed to the sound and naturally gaited flat-shod horse that was the foundation of its earlier success with champions such as Midnight Sun and Merry Go Boy.

In my first meeting as a director, I made a motion to add a trail pleasure flat-shod division to TWHBEA's National Futurity. The motion met staunch opposition from Tennesseans like [W. David Landrum](#), then one of the top "Big Lick" trainers in the breed. Fortunately, after a heated debate, we prevailed, and the division was added in 2006.

Following that first event's successful participation, I wrote a letter to the Celebration pleading the case to add a two and three-year-old trail pleasure division to the world championship show, and the next year they did. The class was so full of horses it was split into two divisions. Now more than a decade later, the trail pleasure events generally garner more horses than the "Big Lick" classes with stacked shoes and ankle chains that have dwindled to only three or four horses competing in some events.

But despite the very clear popularity of the new divisions, and dwindling archaic "Big Lick" events, the old guard is still determined to hang on the painful past, and they've maintained control of the breed with the mentality that it's their "God given right to sore their horses," yes, I've actually heard recent TWHBEA directors make that statement.



A horse's foot wearing chains and stacked shoes is still legal and is integral to the illegal practice of soring, says Marty Irby, executive director of Animal Wellness Action. Photo credit: Bradley Dick

In 2013, after years of trying to make change from within, I decided to launch a public campaign to end soring by supporting the [Prevent All Soring Tactics \(PAST\) Act](#) that would eliminate the use of large stacked shoes and ankle chains on the horses' feet; eliminate the industry's corrupt self-policing scheme; and increase penalties for violators caught soring. The [backlash from within the breed was fierce](#) and eventually left me no choice but to leave the state for my own personal safety.

Now seven years later, I'm still working on it, but as a leader of an animal protection group with the capacity to make lasting change. We've built enormous political support for our position in the Congress, but the [horses appear to be as sore as ever](#). The defenders of the status quo are shrinking in number, and these insiders are concentrated in a five or six

county area centered around Bedford County – still hanging on to their chains. It amazes me that even amidst the times we live where Confederate statues are being toppled and dismantled, and state flags and the names of football teams are being changed, that these relics of the past remain front and center on the horses' feet. It took 81 years for the Celebration to ban the display of Confederate flags on the showgrounds, something implemented this year. How long will it take to ban the stacks and chains?



Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and an eight-time World Champion equestrian who was named as one of The Hill's Top Lobbyists for 2019 and 2020, and was recently honored by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, II for his work to protect horses. Follow him on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook @MartyIrby.

<https://tennesseelookout.com/2020/10/21/commentary-when-will-the-tennessee-walking-horse-be-unchained/>

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**Lamar Alexander urged to support
bill to stop soring of horses |
Opinion**

Soring intentionally inflicts pain to Tennessee Walking Horses' legs and hooves to produce an artificial high step known as the "big lick."

Marty Irby Guest columnist

Published 10:46 a.m. CT June 25, 2020

- Marty Irby is the executive director of Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., a former eight-time world champion rider and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association in Lewisburg.

While the nation is grappling with the COVID-19 pandemic and the aftermath of protests in response to the murder of George Floyd, animal protection advocates continue to grapple with the abuses that the voiceless face each day, including the ongoing cruelty to Tennessee Walking Horses.

I've been working for the past decade — first within the industry as president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association, the breed registry established in 1935, and now as an animal protection lobbyist in Washington, D.C. — to end the scourge of soring: intentionally inflicting pain to horses' legs and hooves to produce an artificial high-step known as the "big lick."



Horse shoes are shown during a news conference, ahead of a House vote on a bill that would prevent Soring in training Tennessee Walking horses on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday, July 24, 2019. (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana) *Jose Luis Magana, AP*

At the opening of each show season, we generally see a rise in the debate and rhetoric regarding the use of large, stacked shoes and ankle chains placed on the horses' feet to exacerbate the pain they feel from the application of caustic chemicals such as kerosene, mustard oil and croton oil. There's also a long game of tug of war between the owners and trainers of "big lick" horses and the inspectors from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which is charged with enforcing the Horse Protection Act – a measure championed by the legendary U.S. Sen. Howard Baker, R-Tenn., and signed into law by President Richard M. Nixon in 1970 – which was designed to stamp out the abuse.



U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn., accompanied by Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore., speaks during a news conference ahead of a House vote on a bill that would prevent soring in training Tennessee walking horses July 24, 2019. *Jose Luis Magana/AP*

USDA letting soring run rampant

The “big lick” faction believes the USDA has treated them unfairly and that the inspection procedures are very subjective. Those of us vocal against the “big lick” believe that since Secretary Sonny Perdue took the reins at USDA, soring has been allowed to run rampant. Perdue’s permitted trainers who’ve signed consent decisions for violations of soring to continue showing this year, with them given just a slap on the wrist and a future suspension set to begin when they’re ready to retire. One thing is certain, and we all agree: the U.S. government and the current system have failed.



Horse trainer Carl Bledsoe demonstrates how to cover up soring scars on the foot of a Tennessee walking horse named Gen's Ice Glimmer by using color enhancers and hair fibers. *Shelley Mays/ File / The Tennessean*

And now, it's showtime again in Shelbyville, albeit a few months later than we're generally accustomed to. The Spring Fun Show has kicked off at the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration. This follows the recent Columbia Spring Jubilee where Tennesseans protested the show for the sixth year in a row.



Protesters line the intersection of Lion Parkway and Maury County Park Drive where the Trucks and Trailers carrying the "Big Lick" Horses enter Maury County Park to get to the Show arena. Friday May 29, 2015, in Nashville, TN *Larry McCormack / THE TENNESSEAN*

These advocates have successfully persuaded municipalities to eliminate traditional “big lick” events chock-full of soring from Jackson, Mississippi; Panama City Beach, Florida; and the North Carolina State Fair. They continue to exercise their Constitutional right to peacefully protest events in public, and the wagons are circling and driving the majority of walking horse abusers across the nation into a five- or six- county area centered around Bedford County.

Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act

The good news is change may come. The Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 693/S. 1007, which would ban the large, stacked shoes and ankle chains and eliminate the current inspection system, passed the U.S. House last July with 333 “yes” votes, including U.S. Reps. Tim Burchett (R-Knoxville), Jim Cooper (D-Nashville) and Steve Cohen (D-Memphis). The walls are closing in on the legislators and coalition who’ve long been blocking the bill, and I believe they are beginning to see the light. The Senate companion

measure now has 52 cosponsors, and the Nashville City Council recently passed a measure calling on Tennessee's U.S. senators to join in support of PAST.

With Sen. Lamar Alexander's retirement just six months away, it is my hope that he would rather leave a legacy of opportunity for the Tennessee Walking Horse to step soundly into the future, not a reputation as someone who maintained the status quo and doomed the breed by blocking reforms for the last seven years. After all, Alexander has observed the breed's plight for half a century, having served as an aide to both Howard Baker and President Nixon during the era the Horse Protection Act was enacted.

Change must come. The breed is withering, crowds are shrinking, TWHBEA has become nothing more than a regional club, and young people are taking their enthusiasms for entertainment elsewhere. If the leaders of the industry don't embrace reform, they will be left with nothing at all, and this wonderful breed once known as "America's horse" will pass away due to a stubborn refusal to adapt to a world that recognizes the health and well-being of the horses should have been at the center of the industry's agenda all along.

Marty Irby is the executive director of Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., a former eight-time world champion rider and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association in Lewisburg.

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/2020/06/25/lamar-alexander-urged-support-bill-stop-soring-horses/3254815001/>

HORSE NATION

HORSING AROUND THE WORLD

Eventing Nation

Sport Horse Nation

Monty Roberts Reaffirms Commitment to End Soring as Tennessee Walking Horse Events Begin Amidst COVID-19

May 20, 2020

By Marty Irby

Marty Irby of Animal Wellness Action reminds us of the importance of getting the PAST Act on the floor of the Senate for a vote.



The 75th Walking Horse Celebration in Shelbyville, Tennessee on August 29, 2013. Photo by the HSUS.

By Marty Irby

"I've never seen anything like it before. That filly started out scared to death, trying to climb over the pen, and when he finished with her, she was as gentle as she could be. After 40 minutes, the filly who had taken five men 15 minutes to load in a trailer, walked back into the trailer as though she had done it all of her life." It was in 2006 that Hall of Fame Tennessee Walking Horse trainer Larry Edwards, a man who's likely won more world championships than any living trainer in the breed, spoke those words.

We were at Waterfall Farms in Shelbyville, Tennessee that day with Monty Roberts, "the Man Who Listens to Horses," and he was teaching us how to Join-Up®, a method of natural and non-violent training that those of us in walking horse world had never seen before.

The walking horse breeders and trainers were in dire need of being educated in the ways of non-violent horsemanship, and a paradigm shift was beginning to occur. It's widely known that the breed has been plagued by a painful practice called soring for more than six decades. Soring is the intentional infliction of pain to horses' front limbs to produce an artificial high-stepping gait known as the "big lick." For at least two generations trainers in the walking horse breed have continued a pattern of behavior that perpetuates this abuse quite honestly because they don't anything different.



Veterinarian Angie Lingl investigates for signs of soring at the stables of well-known Tennessee walking horse trainer Jackie McConnell in Fayette County, Tenn. The undercover investigation led to felony criminal indictments against McConnell, for multiple violations of the federal Horse Protection Act. Evidence was found of soring, the application of painful chemicals, and heavy metal chains applied to the horse's front legs. Photo by Lance Murphey for the HSUS.

A few years later, in 2011 while I was serving as President of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association, I decided to reach out to Monty and his daughter Debbie Loucks because several of us had the thought that we should create an annual conference within the industry that provided education and courses in non-violent horsemanship and more humane methods of training. We felt that if we expected the resistance and the soring culture to change, then we must provide them with knowledge and a new path forward. The conference was scheduled to occur in June of 2012, and Monty agreed to join us to help teach others about his non-violent methods as he had done at Waterfall Farms in previous sessions.

Then in May of 2012 *ABC News* released an undercover video of Jackie McConnell – one of the top World Grand Champion 'big lick' Tennessee Walking Horse trainers caught brutally beating and soring horses.

Monty steadfastly refused to come to Tennessee to give courses, speeches or any other connection to the Tennessee Walking Horse unless the industry would pledge in writing to eradicate all soring practices, and the use of large 'stacked' shoes and ankle chains. The majority of those that served on the executive committee I presided over were staunchly against eliminating the large, stacked shoes and ankle chains and refused to comply. The result was Monty did not continue to come and we cancelled the conference. It was discouraging, and I did feel quite defeated, but nevertheless I persisted in the effort to make change.



A Tennessee Walking Horse in stacks, often used in the performance ring. Public domain.

I saw the release of the *ABC News Nightline* expose as the pivotal moment that could be the key turning point for the breed – the point that could be the beginning of the end of soring. In the Fall of that same year, an amendment to the Horse Protection Act of 1970 was introduced in the U.S. Congress – the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act. I began to feel a calling to support the legislation, and in May of the next year made a public declaration to support the bill and began a crusade to pass the PAST Act.

Others joined in: [Monty and Debbie](#); [Priscilla Presley](#), who shared a deep love for the Tennessee Walking Horse with Elvis, and who still maintains walkers on the grounds of Graceland to this day; [Donna Benefield](#), a movie producer who has performed at the Summer Olympics, and who has worked for more than 30 years to eradicate the scourge of soring; [Carl Bledsoe](#), a former “big lick” world champion trainer who’s now completely centered his life and practices around natural horsemanship; [Mark Miller](#), the lead singer of the band Sawyer Brown who I had worked with on building his walking horse bloodstock; Alyssa Milano, [Kesha](#), Willie Nelson, and countless others who continue to back the legislation.

And after six long years of watching a handful of lawmakers block a fair vote on the measure — Members mainly from Tennessee and Kentucky — we finally got a vote on the bill in the House in 2019. Lawmakers passed the PAST Act overwhelmingly, in part thanks to the readers of Horse Nation who've continued to take action and support the bill.

But as many on Capitol Hill often say: most good bills and causes die in the U.S. Senate, which has an array of parliamentary options for obstructionist senators to invoke. Despite the 52 Members of the Chamber that have cosponsored the measure, we have been unable to get the bill to the floor for a vote of all Senators, who if given that chance, would pass it in a landslide. We must all continue to press for passage of the bill, but we must do more. If a new Administration takes the White House this Fall, then there's a strong chance that the U.S. Department of Agriculture will reinstate a regulation to eliminate the use of large, stacked shoes and ankle chains that are utilized in soring and worn on the feet of walking horses in the "big lick" world.

We must also continue to introduce methods of natural horsemanship and non-violent training to the walking horse world and educate them. There are numerous individuals living in the hotbed of Middle Tennessee that continue to push for change within the breed. The Walking Horse Owners Association has eliminated all "big lick" classes and events from their shows, and the National Walking Horse Association has never had them. Despite the negativity these people continue to stand by the breed – it's amazing to see how much pain the Tennessee Walking Horse has endured but still lives on.

There's also efforts by a [Citizens Campaign](#) Against Big Lick Animal Cruelty that is pushing local municipalities to disallow "big lick" events in their domains, and they've been quite successful eliminating traditional pain-based shows full of soring from Jackson, Mississippi; Panama City Beach, Florida; and the North Carolina State Fair. These people have continued to display their Constitutional right to peacefully protest events in public, and the wagons are circling and driving the majority of walking horse abusers into a five or six county area centered around Shelbyville, Tennessee.



Tennessee Walking Horse, courtesy of the Humane Society of the United States

One of the most prominent violators of the Horse Protection Act, Russ Thompson, who sored horses just outside of Los Angeles since the 1980's has now become a permanent fixture in Bedford County. This marks the end of the last pocket of soring in the nation's largest state.

This week Monty Roberts celebrated his 85th birthday, and he's conveyed to me that he's recommitting his efforts to help us end soring. And Priscilla Presley, she remains committed to stand by our work to end soring as well – so have many others. No matter how long it takes to free the Tennessee Walking Horse and end soring, we'll all continue to work towards the day of victory that I am certain we will see, I hold that vision in my mind, and can see it quite clearly. Please join us in the effort and stay the course by [contacting your Senators here](#) and asking them to cosponsor the PAST Act, and [by clicking here to tell the U.S. Department of Agriculture to crackdown on soring](#) and send a team of inspectors to scrutinize the “big lick” events that'll be occurring in the coming month. The Tennessee Walking Horse needs your help, and the good people in the walking horse world are grateful that we're all pushing for change.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., an eight-time world champion rider, and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association. Follow him on Twitter [@MartyIrby](#).

<https://www.horsenation.com/2020/05/20/monty-roberts-reaffirms-commitment-to-end-soring-as-tennessee-walking-horse-events-begin-amidst-covid-19/>



Op-Ed: An Update on the PAST Act

November 25, 2019

By Marty Irby

Marty Irby of Animal Wellness Action issues a call to action to get legislation that would end the abusive practice of soring Tennessee Walking Horses for good passed in the Senate.



The 75th Walking Horse Celebration in Shelbyville, Tennessee on August 29, 2013. Photo by the HSUS.

Six years ago this month, I traveled to Washington, D.C. to [testify before Congress](#) about the painful practice of soring at the request of U.S. Reps. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Ed Whitfield (R-KY) – two of the original leaders of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 693/S. 1007.

Soring is the intentional infliction of pain to horses' front feet by applying caustic chemicals like mustard oil and kerosene to the skin and inserting sharp objects into the soft tissue of the hoof to produce the high-stepping pain-based "Big Lick." The PAST Act would amend the Horse Protection Act (HPA) of 1970 to finally eradicate the practice by eliminating the use of large, stacked shoes and

ankle chains in the show ring, eliminating the industry's self-policing scheme, replacing it with licensed USDA inspectors and increase penalties for those who break the law.



Veterinarian Angie Lingl investigates for signs of soring at the stables of well-known Tennessee walking horse trainer Jackie McConnell in Fayette County, Tenn. The undercover investigation led to felony criminal indictments against McConnell, for multiple violations of the federal Horse Protection Act. Evidence was found of soring, the application of painful chemicals, and heavy metal chains applied to the horses' front legs. Photo by Lance Murphey and courtesy of the HSUS.

The PAST Act was met with tremendous opposition from members of Congress that hail from Tennessee and Kentucky, fueled by the pro-soring coalition that runs rampant in those states. But the majority of the Congress was on a different page and saw the PAST Act as an opportunity for change, and they cosponsored the bill.

On November 13, 2013 (the day of the hearing), I was joined by longtime anti-soring advocate Donna Benefield, Jay Hickey, the president of the American Horse Council (AHC), the American Veterinary Medical Association's (AVMA) executive director, Ron DeHaven and Teresa Bippen, president of Friends of Sound Horses (FOSH). All were testifying in support of PAST.

As a child of the Tennessee Walking Horse industry and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association (TWHBEA), my experience included every aspect and discipline of the breed. My colleague's experiences were different but equally important, and represented the greater voice of the equine, sound horse and veterinary worlds.

We all agreed – the PAST Act was the answer to end the plague of soring that's marred the walking horse for six decades. And we said our peace.

But the abusers were outraged, exposed and they came on the attack with a vengeance, something that was expected from the likes of longtime HPA violator Chip Weddington, who [sent a threatening message](#), saying he'd "knock" me "smooth out" if he ever ran into me again.

[National news stories on the issue and the hearing followed next](#), and the threats of violence escalated. Members of Congress insisted I not return to Tennessee and remain in our Nation's Capital to help with the PAST Act until things cooled off in the walking horses' home state.

But they never did, and six years later I'm still in Washington pushing to get the PAST Act over the goal line. Fortunately, we accomplished a major feat, and PAST – now led by U.S. Reps. Kurt Schrader (D-OR) and Ted Yoho (R-FL) — finally received its long-awaited vote passing the U.S. House by a margin of 333 to 96 in July – with every single Democrat and the majority of Republicans in support.

The vote sent seismic waves through the walking horse world. But as it's said often on Capitol Hill – “most good bills die in the Senate.” And while the Congress has been fighting about impeachment and funding of a wall, the PAST Act has hit a wall in the Senate – and it's stalled.

The bill's now in the hands of U.S. Senator Roger Wicker (R-MS), the chairman of the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, which is the committee with jurisdiction over the bill. We've pushed hard on the Senate leadership, the committee and the rank-and-file members to get the bill moving with little traction.

So now it's time to be creative – and with 50 cosponsors in the Senate, the Nashville Tennessee Metro Council recently passing a resolution calling on the U.S. Senators from Tennessee to support the bill and the Louisville Kentucky City Council passing a similar measure, the folks back home that want to see soring end are rallying once again.



Soring is a heinous practice in which violators intentionally inflict pain on a horse's legs or hooves, forcing the animal to perform an artificial, high-stepping gait called the "big lick." Photo by the HSUS.

We could very well see protests or demonstrations in Elvis Presley's hometown of Tupelo – he was a longtime lover of the Tennessee Walking Horse, and Priscilla

Presley has long been working with us to pass the bill. She joined us on Capitol Hill in January to meet with U.S. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) and Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-CA), and she's been a tireless advocate for the cause.

We could also see more cities in the Southeast advance resolutions in support of the PAST Act: Asheville, North Carolina; Tunica, Mississippi; Decatur, Alabama; all have major three day "Big Lick" horse shows.

We could [see more protests at shows around the country](#) like the one that occurred at this year's Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration in Shelbyville – the breed's world championship event.

We could see another [undercover expose like the Jackie McConnell case in 2012](#). And with a change in guard at TWHBEA in the upcoming weeks we could see the breed registry move in a new direction – we could see a change of heart, or we could see the organization regress even further into the shadows. It is my hope that the industry — and the horse-world at large — can come together to do what's best for the breed and best for the horse, and I encourage everyone to keep their foot on the gas and keep pressing.

[Please take action today by clicking here to ask your U.S. Senators to cosponsor the PAST Act, there are 50 more that we have a shot at obtaining](#). It is time for the people who claim they love the Tennessee Walking Horse to stand up, put their differences aside and work together to make change. It is time for reconciliation for the Tennessee Walking Horse and its people. And it is time to step soundly into the future or there will be no future at all.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., an 8-time world champion rider, and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association.

<https://www.horsenation.com/2019/11/25/op-ed-an-update-on-the-past-act/>



Irby of Animal Wellness Action Issues a Call to Action for Legislation to End Practice of 'Soring'

DECEMBER 1, 2019

BY MARTY IRBY

Six years ago this month, I traveled to Washington, D.C. to [testify before Congress](#) about the painful practice of soring at the request of U.S. Reps. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Ed Whitfield (R-KY) – two of the original leaders of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 693/S. 1007.

Soring is the intentional infliction of pain to horses' front feet by applying caustic chemicals like mustard oil and kerosene to the skin and inserting sharp objects into the soft tissue of the hoof to produce the high-stepping pain-based "Big Lick." The PAST Act would amend the Horse Protection Act (HPA) of 1970 to finally eradicate the practice by eliminating the use of large, stacked shoes and ankle chains in the show ring, eliminating the industry's self-policing scheme, replacing it with licensed USDA inspectors and increase penalties for those who break the law.

The PAST Act was met with tremendous opposition from members of Congress that hail from Tennessee and Kentucky, fueled by the pro-soring coalition that runs rampant in those states. But the majority of the Congress was on a different page and saw the PAST Act as an opportunity for change, and they cosponsored the bill.

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[Please take action today by clicking here to ask your U.S. Senators to cosponsor the PAST Act, there are 50 more that we have a shot at obtaining.](#) It is time for the people who claim they love the Tennessee Walking Horse to stand up, put their differences aside and work together to make change. It is time for reconciliation for the Tennessee Walking Horse and its people. And it is time to step soundly into the future or there will be no future at all.

Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., an 8-time world champion rider, and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association.

<http://www.eastridgenewsonline.com/irby-of-animal-wellness-action-issues-a-call-to-action-for-legislation-to-end-practice-of-soring/>



Marty Irby: House finally passes anti-soring law to protect Tennessee Walking Horse; bill goes to Senate

Jul 28th, 2019

By Marty Irby

The House voted 333 to 96 late yesterday – a landslide vote – in favor of strengthening the federal law against horse soring. It's a joyous moment for me and all animal advocates, horse lovers, and other people of conscience.

Almost exactly seven years ago, I was serving my second year as the president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association (TWHBEA), the breed registry founded in 1935 to promote and protect the Tennessee Walking Horse. The association, for at least 50 years had done everything but protect the walking horse and the breed. A small group of wealthy individuals, years before, had become addicted to an exaggerated version of the breed's natural gait and had turned a great industry into a corrupt one. The "Big Lick," as it's come to be known, had become a marker of cruelty rather than competition.

When I ran for president of the trade association, it was my time to step up and make a difference for the one thing I cared about most in the world – the horses. They have been the only constant in my life to this day.



My first year as president was like the gait of an unmanipulated walking horse – smooth and comfortable. We had increased the membership number for the first time in over a decade, developed an online registration process, and brought in the former CEO of the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration.

Then in May of 2012, while I stood judging a walking horse show in Germany where only the walking horse's natural gait is allowed to be exhibited, ABC Nightline released an undercover video and story about Jackie McConnell. McConnell was one of the top world grand champion trainers, and the video broadcast that night exposed the barbaric soring and beating of horses.

Soring is the intentional infliction of pain to horses' front feet by applying caustic chemicals like mustard oil, and kerosene to the skin, and inserting sharp objects into the soft tissue of the hoof to produce the high-stepping pain-based "Big Lick."

Since the age of three, I had witnessed soring and even participated in it as I got older. I grew up in the marrow of the industry and won many world championships... (but) The day the Jackie McConnell video aired was a thunderbolt. My phone buzzed with tons of calls, emails, and questions from reporters, and I knew that day the Tennessee Walking Horse and my life would never be the same. I saw a light at the end of the dark abyss I'd wanted to change for most of my adult life.

I reached out to a colleague and asked if Wayne Pacelle, who was the most well-known leader in animal protection and the man behind the Jackie McConnell expose' would be willing to come and meet with me. That August Wayne joined me and Ron Thomas from TWHBEA in Smyrna, Tennessee and we discussed the history of soring, the expose,' and the future of the breed. We . . .banded together to end soring for good. . .and formed Animal Wellness Action – after six grueling years of battling soring in a very public way.

Over that period of time, we've had many highs and many many more lows – we suffered setbacks when lawmakers refused to bring up the bill even though it had so much bipartisan support. We had also worked with USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack to finalize a federal rulemaking to eliminate the use of large, stacked shoes and ankle chains on walking horses in the show ring (devices integral to the soring process) and eliminate the industry's failed self-policing program the USDA's own Office of Inspector General deemed "corrupt" and "ineffective." The rule was done, but there was a mix-up on the last day of the Obama Administration, and it was not properly published in the Federal Register by Director Oliver Potts despite U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen, Priscilla Presley, Wayne, myself, and former U.S. Rep. Ed Whitfield burning the midnight oil to try and get the Federal Register published on Inauguration Day for the first time in American history. The folks who took the keys at USDA and the Office of Management and Budget immediately nixed all regulations and that had been in progress, dooming the anti-soring rule.

But today, I have renewed faith, and new hope that the horses will win, the abuse will end, and that the "Big Lick" animal cruelty created by soring will be eradicated from the face of this earth forever.

(The passage) marked one of the most historic days for the protection of our iconic American horses that we've seen in half a century – one of a few since the Horse Protection Act was signed into law by President Richard M. Nixon in 1970.

The House's passing of the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 693, is the biggest moment in the life of this issue in 49 years. Thanks especially to Reps. Kurt Schrader (D-OR), Ted Yoho (R-FL) – co-chairs of the Congressional Veterinary Medicine Caucus – along with Steve Cohen, Ron Estes (R-KS), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), and Chris Collins (R-NY) for leading the bill, and to Reps. Ted Budd (R-NC), Frank Pallone (D-NJ), and Buddy Carter (R-GA) for championing it on the House floor last night. Thanks to the 308 cosponsors of the bill, and to the 333 House lawmakers who voted for it today.

The PAST Act, if enacted into law, will eliminate the large, stacked shoes and ankle chains, will end the industry's failed self-policing system and will also increase penalties for abusers that violate the Horse Protection Act that my late friend Senator Tydings authored.

Marty Irby is head of Animal Wellness Action.

<https://www.nkytribune.com/2019/07/marty-irby-house-finally-passes-anti-soring-law-to-protect-tennessee-walking-horse-bill-goes-to-senate/>



Prevent All Soring Tactic Act will bring prominence back to Tennessee Walking Horses |Opinion

With the PAST act passed, Tennessee Walking Horses are now protected against abuse

Marty Irby Guest Columnist

Published 7:00 p.m. ET Aug. 30, 2019

- Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C.

In March 1984, only four years old, I made my public show-ring appearance aboard Carbon Princess – the 1979 Tennessee Walking Horse World Champion Aged Mare. She was 18 hands tall and had the heart of a champion. Most of all, she was a friend to me.

During that era, my competitors came from far and wide – many of them the sons and daughters of Tennessee Walking Horse trainers who either train or still compete today. We showed all across the region, from Pin Oak, Texas to Atlanta, Georgia.

Yet not even one of those horse shows exist today. Why? – Because of soring. Soring is the intentional infliction of pain to Walking Horses front limbs by means of applying caustic chemicals such as croton oil or kerosene, or by cutting the horses' hooves down to the bloodline, known as "the quick"

and then driving nails into that soft tissue, making it hurt when they would touch the ground



Rep. Kurt Schrader D-OR., accompanied by Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn., speaks during a news conference, ahead of a House vote on a bill that would prevent Soring in training Tennessee Walking horses on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday, July 24, 2019. (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana) *Jose Luis Magana, AP*

My first experiences with soring

By August 1985, I made my debut at the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration aboard my tall black mare, and I recall standing amidst the middle of that show ring with thousands of people cheering. With double sided tape in the saddle and my seat, rubber bands around my feet in the stirrups, and loop reins I could hold, my parents subscribed me to an addiction known as the “Big Lick” --- an artificial pain-based high-stepping gait that can only be produced by soring. “The ride of your life” – that was the campaign slogan

utilized by the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association (TWHBEA) at the time.

I was one of many people intense about competition and winning, but later realized that we were all in competition to out cheat each other, at the expense of animals suffering in agony.

The World Equestrian Games held in Lexington mailed back our breed registry's \$20,000 sponsorship of the event. The American Horse Council later made the same thing clear to me as president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association- they didn't want the breed at their events, nor the association with the stigma of soring and the "Big Lick."

What's currently being done

Last month, the U.S. House of Representatives voted by a margin of 333 to 96 to pass the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 693, that would end the scourge of soring once and for all. All the decades of illegal and unethical behavior has built the brand of the Tennessee Walking Horse as a corrupt, cheating industry.

The PAST Act eliminates the use of devices the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture deemed a menace to horses in 1979 but they are still used today -- large stacked shoes and ankle chains attached to the horses' feet in the showring. Opponents of the PAST Act will argue that these devices don't hurt the horses, but the American Veterinary Medical Association says that stacks and chains are inextricably linked to soring and should therefore be removed.

Either way, the stacks and chains that have been in place in their current form since I was showing in youth classes in the 1980's, are grotesque, archaic, and look like something medieval. In the world of social media – where videos and pictures are sent around the world in seconds – there's no excuse for this cruelty, and no hiding it any longer.

Years of mistreating horses have sunk their reputation

However, America can once again be proud of the Tennessee Walking Horse by allowing the breed to expand through versatility - events like dressage, barrel racing, pole bending, jumping, trail riding, eventing, and in the show ring – not just running around in a circle being judged on how high a horse it picks up its front legs, and how low it squats with its back ones.

Bright future ahead if right steps are taken.

Even the Nashville Davidson Metro Council voted unanimously to endorse the PAST Act in recent weeks – and one third of the Tennessee House delegation, Reps. Tim Burchett (R-Knoxville), Jim Cooper (D-Nashville), and Steve Cohen (D-Memphis) voted with the majority of the House to pass the bill as well.

That speaks volumes.

It is time for the people that claim they truly love Tennessee Walking Horses, and the State of Tennessee – including U.S. Senators Lamar Alexander and Marsha Blackburn – to stand up, put their differences aside, and come together to make change. It is time to pass the PAST Act, and step soundly into the future – or there will be no future at all.

Tennessee can remove the stigma of being known as the “Horse Abuse Capitol of the World” and the Tennessee Walking Horse breed can remove the label of being the most abused horse on earth, but only with legitimate change by eliminating the stacked shoes and ankle chains. Otherwise, the breed will simply be known in public relations schools across the nation as the textbook case of “what not to do,” and ironically – a thing of the PAST.”

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., eight-time World Champion rider, and a Past President of

*the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association in
Lewisburg, TN.*

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2019/08/30/tennessee-walking-horses-reclaim-esteem-through-anti-soring-act/2153665001/>



Tennessee's Walking Horse 'tradition' should get back on track | Opinion

The "Big Lick" pain-based gait created by soring is a "tradition" Tennesseans and U.S. Sens. Lamar Alexander and Marsha Blackburn shouldn't be working to protect.

Marty Irby Guest columnist

Published 6:00 a.m. ET July 1, 2019

- Marty Irby is the Executive Director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and a Past President of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association in Lewisburg.

When U.S. Sens. Howard Baker, R-Tennessee, and Joseph Tydings, D-Maryland, worked to pass the Horse Protection Act in 1970, I doubt they could have imagined that horse soring would still be rampant in the industry nearly 50 years later and that most of the members of the Tennessee

Congressional delegation would be in denial about the abuse walking horse trainers administer to horses.



As a former Tennessean, past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association, eight-time world champion and lifelong supporter of the Tennessee Walking Horse, I've seen and witnessed firsthand how the rampant practice of soring has ruined the breed. The "Big Lick" pain-based gait created by soring is a "tradition" Tennesseans and U.S. Sens. Lamar Alexander and Marsha Blackburn shouldn't be working to protect.

I know about this abuse because I was once knee-deep in this world. The "Big Lick" addiction is a generational curse that my own family embraced, and I was exposed to it -- and the many rationalizations for it -- at the tender age of 3. The truth behind the thrill and adrenaline rush of winning and the accolades awarded weren't something I understood as a child, but it infected my spirit as I became a young adult.

Horse-soring culprits hard to track

During my awakening, in 2006, with much resistance from the pro-soring coalition, I fought to add a trail pleasure division to the National Futurity – a class with no large, stacked shoes or ankle chains – where the horses could be exhibited in their natural form. At the time, I was deemed quite crazy, but today the trail pleasure division continues to grow by leaps and bounds while

the “Big Lick” stigma continues to repel people and cause them to leave the industry.

Over the years, trainers have gotten more sophisticated at inflicting pain on the horses and covering up the abuse, while the owners and exhibitors continue manipulating their political allies in an attempt to halt any progress. And now, U.S. Reps. Ted Yoho (R-Florida) and Kurt Schrader (D-Oregon) -- leaders of the Congressional Veterinary Medicine Caucus -- and U.S. Sens. Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) and Mark Warner (R-Virginia) have introduced the PAST (Prevent All Soring Tactics) Act (H.R. 693 and S. 1007). Their measures, which have attracted 345 co-sponsors in the two chambers, would eliminate the failed system of industry self-policing and the use of soring devices -- the large, stacked shoes and ankle chains on horses' feet -- and increase penalties for abusers, a provision U.S. Department of Agriculture has proven a need for with its recent consent decisions that allow abusers to continue competing until 2022 before ever serving a day's suspension.



Tennessee Walking Horse Santana's El Nino ridden by Link Webb runs around Shields Watkins Field before the start of the Volunteers homecoming game against the University of Wyoming Cowboys last year in Neyland Stadium. *Michael Patrick/News Sentinel*

As a lifelong Republican who's worked in Congress, I agree with Alexander, Blackburn and even U.S. Rep. Scott DesJarlais on many issues. But not on this

one. I also question their invoking of the economic footprint of the industry. TWHBEA memberships have declined from around 20,000 in 1997 to less than 5,600 in 2018, and the number of registrations declined from 15,245 in 2001 to fewer than 4,100 in 2018. Attendance at the National Celebration has continued to plummet from the days of 30,000-plus to less than 10,000 on any given night during the past few years. And stallion breeding fee prices have drastically declined, as is evident in TWHBEA's own long-term "Sire of the Year," Jose' Jose', whose fee was \$5,000 in 2007 and is \$3,000 today.

Groups look to Obama to end 'soring' for Tennessee Walking Horses

Ironically, the lawmakers defending the industry are dooming it. The only way for the breed to thrive and flourish is to step soundly into the future and embrace the changes that should have been made decades ago. It's the right thing to do for the horses and the state.

Our modern-day society will no longer accept archaic, inhumane practices – as is evident with bans on dogfighting and cockfighting in every state, the end of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus and its wild-animal acts, and the ban on breeding orcas that live in small pools at SeaWorld.

Tennesseans and walking horse enthusiasts should create a new tradition based on the sound natural gait of the horse, honest inspections and a level playing field for the horses, owners, trainers and exhibitors to enjoy.



Kendall Riley and Abigail pet Officer Rango, a Tennessee Walking Horse at Sumner Goes Gold in Hendersonville, TN on Sun. Sept. 24, 2107. *David Cardaciotto*

The so-called Horse Protection Amendments Act bills by DesJarlais, Alexander and Blackburn have fewer than two dozen supporters; the PAST Act has 345. The PAST Act will soon come to the House floor for a vote, and lawmakers will vote overwhelmingly to stop the cruelty. And last week, the U.S. House voted to provide the Department of Justice with \$2 million in new funding to enforce the Horse Protection Act and prosecute animal cruelty crimes.

Baker and Tydings could not have anticipated decades of obstructionism and trickery. But in the end, it's their best hopes for proper treatment of horses that will prevail. I want to see the Tennessee Walking Horse grow for generations to come and take its rightful place as America's horse – the horse that Dale Evans, Roy Rogers and even John Wayne once proudly rode – no longer America's dirty little secret, and the time for that to happen has come.

Marty Irby is the Executive Director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association in Lewisburg.

<https://www.knoxnews.com/story/opinion/2019/07/01/tennessees-walking-horse-tradition-should-get-back-track/1517419001/>



Op-Ed: The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

MAY 10, 2019

BY MARTY IRBY

Marty Irby of Animal Wellness Action details how close we finally are to passing legislation that would end the abusive practice of soring Tennessee Walking Horses for good — a practice that's managed to survive for decades.



Source: Flickr/USDA/CC

“Congressman William Whitehurst of Virginia has introduced a bill into the House which would stop such torture,” wrote LIFE magazine in October of 1969.

“Washington’s most determined friend of the walker, however, may be Maryland’s Joseph D. Tydings, equestrian and senator who has introduced a similar bill in the senate.”

The legislation referenced was the Horse Protection Act, designed to end an archaic and barbaric practice known as soring in the equine world, and it was signed into law by President Richard M. Nixon in 1970.

But sometimes the most well-intentioned plans don’t play out as the architects imagined. The law contained some loopholes, but most importantly, key players in the industry embarked on a sustained campaign to defy the law and do their best to both co-opt the agency on enforcement and coerce it when it could.

Soring, the intentional infliction of pain to horses’ front legs to achieve an artificial high-stepping gait known as the “big lick,” has been a plague that has marred the equine world and decimated the Tennessee Walking Horse breed for more than sixty years, and still runs rampant throughout the Southeastern U.S. This form of animal exploitation, likened to something seen in the Colosseum

during ancient games at the height of the Roman Empire, is exhibited annually at the [Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration](#) in Shelbyville, Tennessee. [LIFE's account](#) of the soring activities and state of affairs written in 1969 reads much like articles from 2019, and nearly every decade during the fifty-year span in between. Senator Tydings, a legend in Maryland politics and the equine world, worked for 48 years following the passage of the HPA to fortify the law and to see the day that soring was stamped out for good.

Unfortunately, Senator Tydings didn't live to see that day, but there is a strong movement at work to pass the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act.

The law is needed more than ever. Just recently, a former "big lick" owner and rider reached out with some news of treacherous abuse – pressure shoeing – allegedly performed by a notorious trainer and farrier.

The horse owner identified [Joseph Abernathy as the farrier that allegedly "pressure shod" the horse](#) by driving hot nails into the part of the horse's hoof where blood flows. When the owner found the horse, which was shod without his knowledge, he was barely able to stand and drenched in sweat despite 40-degree temperatures at the time. The horse's muscle enzymes were elevated and caused him to go into renal failure.

USDA confirmed with us that the horse's owner had contacted the USDA about the incident, but the loopholes in the Federal law have allowed such practices to be legal on private property, and USDA couldn't take action.

[Click here, here, and here, to watch videos of the alleged pressure shoeing damage and horse in distress after front legs and hooves were intentionally injured in soring incident.](#)

But there is cause for hope with the introduction of the "U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act," H.R. 693 – renamed to honor Senator Tydings, by veterinarian U.S. Reps. Kurt Schrader (D-OR) and Ted Yoho (R-FL) in January. The PAST Act – which currently has 241 House cosponsors – and garnered 290 cosponsors in the 115th Congress, including U.S. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD) – would amend Tydings' 1970 law to ban the use of large, stacked shoes and ankle chains in the showring (devices integral to the soring process), eliminate the industry's failed and corrupt self-policing program and replacing it with licensed USDA inspectors at no cost to the taxpayer, and increase penalties for abusers.

And last month, U.S. Senators Mike Crapo (R-ID), and Mark Warner (D-VA) introduced the PAST Act, S. 1007 in the U.S. Senate with four additional Republican, and five Democrat cosponsors from a wide array of states including Kansas, Montana, Pennsylvania, Maine, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Oregon and California.

The PAST Act has been introduced in each Congress since 2013, but Republican lawmakers from Tennessee and Kentucky, whose campaign coffers have [been filled with funds](#) from [documented violators of the Horse Protection Act](#), have blocked the bill to maintain the status quo. With the new House leadership in place, and both House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and Leader Hoyer at the helm, we believe the measure can soon be brought to vote – cementing Senator Tydings’ legacy, and finally ending the torture of these majestic horses once and for all, but we need your help to get it over the finish line. Please contact your Members of Congress at 202-224-3121 [or by clicking here to ask them to cosponsor H.R. 693/S. 1007](#) – the horses are counting on you.

Marty Irby is the executive director of Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., former eight-time world champion rider, and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders’ & Exhibitors’ Association.

https://www.horsenation.com/2019/05/10/op-ed-the-more-things-change-the-more-they-stay-the-same/?utm_campaign=shareaholic&utm_medium=facebook&utm_source=socialnetwork&fbclid=IwAR1Hn8-z97EY93LdmOsq540Lw2JBSAir8qzc8sfAkQ0jGopWS3qIbxe6ho

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Urge Congress to pass Prevent All Soring Tactics Act | Opinion

It’s precisely because of the presence of Tennessee Walking Horses in so many aspects of our culture that we have a special obligation to protect them.

Marty Irby Guest columnist

Published 9:00 p.m. CT April 21, 2019

- Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association in Lewisburg.

Horse-soring culprits hard to track

When most folks think of Tennessee, they think of Jack Daniels, Elvis Presley and Graceland, country music, the UT Vols and, in many cases, the Tennessee Walking Horse – the greatest, most versatile and smoothest breed of horse there is.

As a former Tennessean, past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitor's Association and eight-time World Champion rider, I've been a lifelong supporter of the breed. The Tennessee Walking Horse has given so much to the state, and it's tied to many of our cultural symbols and industries like Jack Daniels, whose Old Number 7 remains the top-selling American whiskey in the world, and who built the brand and company straight from the spring-fed "holler" in Lynchburg by hauling corn in and shipping sour mash whiskey out on the backs of horses and the wagons they pulled.

Elvis Presley spent many days taking a break to ride his walkers down to the gates of Graceland to exhibit and show off for the fans – the horses were one of his major passions in life – and his ex-wife, Priscilla Presley, and the family still maintain walkers at Graceland.

Country music stars like Tanya Tucker and the band Sawyer Brown have owned and ridden walkers, and even Taylor Swift, a horsewoman at heart, weighed in on the Tennessee Walking Horse during last year's Senate election.

In addition, the University of Tennessee allows exhibition of a Tennessee Walking Horse at the annual Homecoming Game each year.

It's precisely because of the presence of Tennessee Walking Horses in so many aspects of our culture that we have a special obligation to protect them, but we aren't doing it. Horse abuse is rampant in Tennessee, and I should know. I was right in the center of the industry that perpetuates soring.



A horseshoe, pad and chains often associated with soring of Tennessee walking horses *Larry McCormack / File / The Tennessean*

Soring is the intentional infliction of pain to horses' front limbs by applying caustic chemicals such as mustard oil or diesel fuel and inserting sharp objects into horses' hooves to produce an artificial pain-based gait known as the "Big Lick." It's animal cruelty that's exhibited in Shelbyville each summer at the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration, a show with around 30,000 seats that has fewer than 10,000 bodies in the chairs on any given night.

Because of soring, UT no longer allows the celebration's "Big Lick" World Grand Champion to be exhibited at the game, instead using a sound, flat-shod natural walker that performs the inherit gait. Jack Daniels dropped their sponsorship of the celebration, just 17 miles down the road from the distillery. As for the country music stars. they've spoken out publicly about

soring, going as far as describing how they've seen and experienced soring firsthand.



A horse trainer demonstrates how to cover up soring scares on a Tennessee Walking Horse's foot by using color enhancers and hair fibers. The left foot is enhanced while the right is not. *Shelley Mays/The Tennessean*

But more must be done. The Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 693/S.1007, has once again been introduced in the U.S. Senate and House by bipartisan Sens. Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) and Mark Warner (D-Va.) and veterinarian Reps. Kurt Schrader (D-Oregon) and Ted Yoho (R-Fla.) – co-chairs of the Congressional Veterinary Caucus. They all hail from states where walking horses don't display much if any of the "Big Lick," and whose sound horse advocates and constituents have been negatively affected by the stigma of soring for decades. These members of Congress have consistently been joined by an overwhelming majority of the 535 members of both chambers in supporting the PAST Act during every Congress since 2013 but haven't seen the legislation move forward to a vote.

Why? Because the pro-soring coalition knows how to pay to play the game, attracting the support of a few lawmakers who have been able to thwart

reform. These lawmakers have worked to block the PAST Act, which would amend the Horse Protection Act of 1970 to eliminate the use of large, stacked shoes and ankle chains in the show ring, replace the industry's failed self-policing system with licensed U.S. Department of Agriculture inspectors at no cost to the taxpayer, and increase penalties for violators.

The members of Congress who support the pro-soring coalition have repeatedly received campaign contributions from violators of the HPA for decades and are killing the breed. It's time for this abuse and collusion to end. I implore Tennesseans to stand up, speak out, relieve the Volunteer State from being known as the "Horse Abuse Capitol of the World" and free the Tennessee Walking Horse from the generational curse of soring that has marred it for six decades. The Tennessee Walking Horse – no longer associated with the enterprise of cheating at horse shows and victimized by people who want to get a leg ahead – can have its luster restored and can be tied to our cultural markers with pride once again.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association in Lewisburg.

https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/2019/04/22/urge-congress-pass-prevent-all-soring-tactics-act/3525644002/?fbclid=IwAR1eja0ttZSzdifn9gX53KlF4qQQD-yEMswxse_SETbcXTnuhypvRYpRIP4



Guest Editorial: ‘The Gloves Are Off Now’

MARCH 8, 2019

BY MARTY IRBY

“The PAST Act is a threat to the law breakers and the cheaters.” Marty Irby, Executive Director of Animal Wellness Action, writes this editorial for Horse Nation to rally readers to effect political change that could end the practice of soring.



Source: Flickr/USDA/CC

[Animal Wellness Action](#) is a Washington D.C.-based organization that seeks to help animals and promote animal welfare through the promotion of legal standards that forbid cruelty. The group's efforts largely focus on influencing lawmakers and ensuring that lawmakers who care about

animal issues are elected. Ongoing priorities for the current 115th Congress include banning the sale of shark fins in the United States, applying laws against dogfighting and cockfighting to US territories, and others — including support of the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act, aimed at cracking down on the long-standing practice of soring in Tennessee Walking Horses. Executive Director Marty Irby writes this editorial.

“The gloves are off now,” wrote horseman John Amos in May 1960. “We plan a rough-handed campaign against soring. Our changed bylaws give us the authority to act and punish. And we will.”

Amos was the right guy to announce that kind of campaign. He was chairman of the executive committee at the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders’ & Exhibitors’ Association (TWHBEA, then known as TWHBA, less “exhibitors”), the breed registry founded in Lewisburg, Tennessee in 1935, and a stalwart in the industry.

But his dream never became reality. [Sports Illustrated’s account](#) of the meeting says a group of trainers led by the legendary World Grand Champion trainer Vic Thompson opposed the efforts to end soring. It was such an explosive subject within the fraternity that fists started flying and violence erupted. Tom Fulton, the executive secretary of the TWHBA, clipped W. O. Crawford, a former candidate for the presidency of the organization, on the head and knocked him down. For the next ten years soring persisted, and the industry leadership didn’t have the power or the will to crack down on the practice. But outsiders started to take notice. Congress passed the Horse Protection Act of 1970, led by U.S. Senator Joe Tydings (D-MD) and supported by Senator Howard Baker (R-TN). Finally, there was a plan to clean up the sport and stop the animal cruelty. But, again, the best laid plans didn’t turn out as their architects wished. The industry defied the regulators, found ways to hide the practice, and went on abusing horses.

Soring has been a multi-generational curse upon the Tennessee Walking Horse. It’s the painful practice of applying caustic chemicals such as diesel fuel, kerosene, and mustard oil to horses front feet or inserting sharp objects to induce a pain-based exaggerated high-stepping gait known as the “big lick.”

SI’s account doesn’t sound much different than my own personal experiences in the walking horse industry more than half a century later as the president and immediate past president of TWHBEA when I joined other TWHBEA leaders and publicly spoke up and voted to support the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, which was designed to upgrade and give teeth to the original 1970 law.

The PAST Act had been introduced by Congressmen from Tennessee and Kentucky, and for that reason, I thought we had a shot at getting it done. But yet one more time, those plans were thwarted by the good-old-boy network that had long circled the wagons and defended the corruption and animal abuse.

They didn't stop at blocking the PAST Act. The pro-soring coalition comprised of big lick trainers, officials from the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration, and even members of my own family set out to discredit me. [I had agreed to testify before Congress](#) in support of the PAST Act and the death threats started rolling in. The decision to confront the corruption in a very public way, as a leader insider in the industry, [triggered a series of personal misfortunes that turned my life upside down](#): my divorce, bankruptcy, and departure from Tennessee for my own personal safety and sanity.

On the upside, there were encouraging words from strangers, horse lovers, animal protection advocates all around the globe, and from a select few from within the industry that had also tried to end soring, speak out publicly, and had paid a high personal price as well.

"I have known for some time that anyone who sits in the President's seat and truly tries to do what is in the best interest of TWHBEA will eventually recognize what must be done to protect the future of TWHBEA, its members, and the horse," former TWHBEA president Jerrold Pedigo wrote in a communique to me. "Whether or not they have the guts to try and do anything or simply keep the seat warm is another question."

"The walking horse industry will one day return to what made it great: natural, flat-shod, and smooth gaited horses," publicly declared Clay Harlin, a past vice-president of TWHBEA and member of the famed family owners of [Harlinsdale Farm](#), and the legendary [Midnight Sun](#) – a name you'll find on nearly every living Tennessee Walking Horse's pedigree today. "I am grateful for a new generation of leaders who care about the breed and not their own selfish interest. There is hope for the Tennessee Walking Horse."

Six years have passed since our efforts to pass the PAST Act began, and the pro-soring coalition has continued its defensive maneuvers, including filling the campaign coffers of Republicans from Tennessee and Kentucky with piles of cash. Their ability to stymie reform is a political science lesson in the way special interests are able to leverage their influence to delay broadly supported reforms.

The PAST Act is a threat to the law breakers and the cheaters. The bipartisan legislation would eliminate the use of large, stacked shoes and ankle chains on horses' feet in the show ring, establish a new inspection system to create a level playing field at no cost the taxpayer, and increase penalties for those who violate the law. PAST is still desperately needed because the new leadership at USDA, acting on behalf of the "big lick" crowd, rolled back a final rule that the agency's prior leaders advanced in January 2017 to ban the stacked shoes and ankle change and eliminate the industry self-regulation scheme that's allowed the abuse to flourish. The present set of leaders at USDA even disabled a searchable website that allowed the public to determine which trainers and owners were routinely violating the law – keeping the public in the dark and allowing abusers to return to the shadows.

If you buy a Tennessee Walking Horse today, there is no path to find out if the horse you're buying does or doesn't have a pending federal case for violations of abuse, or if the trainer and seller do either.

But there is cause for hope with the change in House leadership. The PAST Act's leaders, U.S. Reps. Kurt Schrader (D-OR), and Ted Yoho (R-FL), are both veterinarians. What's more, they've added some history to their bill, H.R. 693, renaming it the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics Act in honor of the Senator who authored the original 1970 law. We've spoken directly with House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, and Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, and we believe the PAST Act will soon receive its long-deserved vote on the House floor with your help.

Last year's version of the PAST Act attracted an astounding 340 cosponsors in the House and Senate thanks to the readers and action takers of Horse Nation. This year's versions, including the soon-to-be introduced Senate companion to H.R. 693, will attract even more support, and the House bill already has 160 cosponsors. By contacting your Members of Congress at 202-224-3121 or [by clicking here to ask them to cosponsor H.R. 693](#), we can finally get this bill signed into law. You can and will make the difference.

Marty Irby is the executive director of Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., a former 8-time World Champion rider, and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association.

<https://www.horsenation.com/2019/03/08/guest-editorial-the-gloves-are-off-now/>



OPINION: Elvis' Legacy Lives On In Congress Through The PAST Act To Protect Horses



GETTY IMAGES

BY MARTY IRBY
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, ANIMAL WELLNESS ACTION

January 25, 2019 | 1:31 PM ET

Last week, Priscilla Presley — wife of the late, great Elvis Presley, the “king of rock ‘n roll” — went to Capitol Hill to voice her support for passage of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, a measure that’s been dangling in the wind in Congress for six years.

She did so because, in addition to rock ‘n roll, Elvis loved Tennessee Walking Horses. She confidently said that if Elvis were alive today, he’d be on Capitol Hill with her, advocating for the protection of the horses he so deeply cared for.

Priscilla described how Elvis loved riding his Tennessee Walking Horse, Ebony’s Double, down to the gates of Graceland to exhibit for the fans.

Elvis would be shaking in his shoes for all the wrong reasons if he saw how people injure these gentle horses by soring them.

Soring is the painful practice of injuring Tennessee Walking Horses’ front limbs by applying caustic chemicals to the skin and inserting sharp objects under the horses’ hooves to achieve an artificial, high-stepping gait known as the “big lick” that runs rampant throughout the Southeastern United States.

Maryland Democratic Sen. Joe Tydings was a champion for the PAST Act up until his final months at age 90. He authored the Horse Protection Act (HPA) of 1970, which the PAST Act amends to close loopholes, which has allowed soring to persist.

The bipartisan PAST Act would eliminate the use of large stacked shoes and ankle chains at horse shows, replace the industry’s failed self-policing system with licensed and trained USDA

subcontractors at no cost to the taxpayer, and increase penalties for those found in violation of the HPA.

Arguably, Walking horses are among the most abused horses in the world — the victims of a “training” practice that’s marred and corrupted the breed since the 1950s.

The PAST Act was first introduced in the 113th Congress and garnered 308 cosponsors in the House and 60 in the Senate, including the majority of the majority party in each chamber.

But former establishment Ohio Republican House Speaker John Boehner and Virginia Republican Leader Eric Cantor blocked the measure, and Nevada Democratic Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid allowed the bill to stall after it passed through committee, all because of a few Members in both chambers from Tennessee and Kentucky whose campaign coffers have been filled with funds from animal abusers for decades.

Priscilla began to advocate for passage of the PAST Act in 2014, and she helped garner the support of former U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and Nebraska Republican Sen. Mike Johanns as a cosponsor, along with several others. But Leaders in both parties just danced around the issue, pandering to those who’d been receiving the campaign cash.

The measure was reintroduced in the 114th and 115th Congresses in both chambers, by U.S. Reps. Ted Yoho, Kurt Schrader, Steve Cohen, and Sens. Mike Crapo and Mark Warner, and closed out the 115th Congress with 290 cosponsors in the House and 46 in the Senate — but still, no action was taken.

Ms. Presley’s trip to our Nation’s Capital last week proved to be productive. She met with U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and U.S. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer — who has cosponsored the measure in each Congress it’s been introduced, and other Members of Congress.

Presley’s trip followed an appeal from Sen. Tydings’ family to rename the legislation in honor of Senator Tydings and move it swiftly to the floor for a vote — on Tuesday, the measure was reintroduced in the U.S. House by bipartisan Reps. Schrader, Yoho, and Cohen, along with Reps. Ron Estes, Jan Schakowsky and Chris Collins, renamed the “U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial PAST Act,” H.R. 693.

The PAST Act has more support than any other animal protection reform with endorsements from the American Horse Council, American Association of Equine Practitioners, American Veterinary Medical Association, United States Equestrian Federation, National Sheriff’s Association, and the veterinary medical associations from all 50 states.

As a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders’ & Exhibitors’ Association (the breed registry since 1935), 8-time World Champion rider, and life-long supporter of the Tennessee Walking Horse, I’ve seen the egregious practice of soring firsthand, including horses’ feet that look like pizza with the cheese pulled off from chemical burns.

It’s time to pass the PAST Act, and we hope that House Energy and Commerce Committee

Chairman Frank Pallone (D-NJ), Senate Commerce Committee Chairman Roger Wicker – who hails from Elvis' hometown of Tupelo – Leader Hoyer, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, and Speaker Pelosi will take swift action and pass the PAST Act.

Marty Irby is the executive director of Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association.

https://dailycaller.com/2019/01/25/elvis-past-act-horses/?fbclid=IwAR1k8hZIYJ7_rLSyr8R-N2hz-W8AZHrSciQek0Plqy1OiiDq3Lc3pnOSxk



The new Democratic Congress has an opportunity to move legislation to help horses

BY MARTY IRBY, OPINION CONTRIBUTOR - 01/16/19 1:20 PM ET



Getty Images

For the past eight years, Congress has failed to do much of anything to help the iconic American horses many of us revere as a symbol of our nation, and symbol of the trails

our ancestors blazed across the old west – the very creatures whose backs America was built upon. The 19th-century economy could not have flourished without their labors, and horses helped in the fields, in human transport, the movement of goods, and even in delivering the mail with the Pony Express. Today, we don't use horses nearly as much for work, relying instead on mechanized transportation, but they remain our trusted companions and are still widely part of our economy in the form of sport and recreation.

There have been three key pieces of legislation introduced in successive congresses, but House leadership didn't act on them even though all the bills attracted broad bipartisan support. A few obstructionist members did the bidding for horse abusers and helped to thwart the advance of common-sense measures to help horses and the industries they serve.

The first, with 290 co-sponsors in the House during the 115th Congress, is the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act that would end the soring of Tennessee Walking Horses – an issue I'm all too familiar with as a former Tennessean, eight-time World Champion rider, and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association. The PAST Act would eliminate the use of large stacked shoes, ankle chains, and other torturous devices that are used to create an artificial, high-stepping pain-based gait, known as the "big lick," and has been championed by U.S. Reps. Steve Cohen (D-Tenn.), Kurt Schrader (D-Ore.), and Ted Yoho (R-Fla.).

The use of these devices combined with burning caustic chemicals such as mustard oil, and kerosene applied to the front limbs of horses has created this freakish look that would easily fit into the scene of the abusive games found at the height of the Roman Empire. The PAST Act would also eliminate the industry's failed self-policing program by replacing it with licensed USDA certified inspectors, at no cost to the taxpayer, and increase penalties for violators of the Horse Protection Act.

Secondly, the Safeguard American Food Exports (SAFE) Act, most recently, with 219 co-sponsors in the House, led by U.S. Reps. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), and Vern Buchanan (R-Fla.), would end the slaughter of American equines for human consumption, and ensure that the horses wouldn't be transported under horrific conditions across the country and into Mexico, and Canada.

Besides being flight animals that are much more skittish than the farm animals typically consumed for food by Americans – horse meat is frequently tainted with harmful drugs that affect the health and safety of those who consume the meat in foreign countries. Horse slaughter plants have been closed in the U.S. for more than a decade by de facto ban – which requires annual renewal in the Congress through the appropriations process – saving the taxpayers millions of dollars each year. The SAFE Act is a permanent fix and a comprehensive policy that will protect American horses from being gathered up predatory kill buyers and taken to be brutally slaughtered.

There is also the Horseracing Integrity Act, led by U.S. Reps. Paul Tonko (D-N.Y.), and Andy Barr (R-Ky.), which would end the doping of American race horses by creating a uniform national standard for drug testing overseen by the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, a private entity that oversees testing at the Olympics, and many other sporting events. With dozens of horses dying on racetracks each year, the need for this legislation that's supported by a vast array of industry groups and racetracks is great, and the future of horse racing hangs in the balance of its enactment.

Each of these measures has consistently been referred to the House Committee on Energy and Commerce Committee but haven't been brought to the House floor for a vote under Republican leadership. With the change of guard in the House, and the Democrats now in control, Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), and Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Frank Pallone (D-N.J.) have an opportunity to move these critical pieces of legislation and underscore to the country what Republican Congressional leaders failed to understand – that Americans revere, and respect, these iconic symbols of our nation.

My fellow Republicans failed to deliver on sound equine policies for the nation – a lack of action that would be alien to horses if they could understand us. These iconic animals have always delivered for humanity, and Congress should help protect them.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association.

<https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/politics/425623-the-new-democratic-congress-has-an-opportunity-to-move/>



Standing Ovation by Ovation Riding: Animal Wellness Action Supports the PAST Act

December 7, 2018

BY MARTY IRBY

"I am every bit as committed to Tennessee Walking horses as ever, but I won't stand by as trainers and owners cause misery by hurting horses to get a leg up in competition."



Source: Flickr/USDA/CC

[Animal Wellness Action](#) is a Washington D.C.-based organization that seeks to help animals and promote animal welfare through the promotion of legal standards that forbid cruelty. The group's efforts largely focus on influencing lawmakers and ensuring that lawmakers who care about animal issues are elected. Ongoing priorities for the current 115th Congress include banning the sale of shark fins in the United States, applying laws against dogfighting and cockfighting to US territories, and others — including support of the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act, aimed at cracking down on the long-standing practice of soring in Tennessee Walking Horses.

Marty Irby, executive director of Animal Wellness Action, writes this op-ed for Horse Nation readers:

From Marty:

Being a horseman is in my blood.

And Tennessee Walking horses have been my addiction. I grew up in Alabama competing in horse shows. And as an adult, I became the volunteer president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association (TWHBEA), the breed registry established in 1935.

To my great chagrin, some of the people in this industry have engaged in a pattern of horse abuse and brought national shame and disrepute to the industry. I am every bit as committed to Tennessee Walking horses as ever, but I won't stand by as trainers and owners cause misery by hurting horses to get a leg up in competition.

Now, as executive director of Animal Wellness Action, a national animal advocacy group, I am working to put an end to the miserable practice of horse soring, where people involved in showing walking horses injure their feet and legs in order to induce an exaggerated high-stepping gait known as the "Big Lick."

The Tennessee Walking Horse officially came into existence as a breed of horse with the establishment of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association (TWHBEA).

My friend, and one of my mentors, Bill Harlin was there that day in 1935 at the Marshall County Courthouse. Mr. Bill was a past president of the association during a tumultuous time and later he helped me more than anyone during my time as president from 2010-2012. Unfortunately, we lost him in 2017, but he lived well into his 90s. He was a legend, as is the Harlin name that most horse folks and Tennesseans would associate with Midnight Sun, whose genetics live on within nearly every living walking horse today.

For the first twenty or so years, the Tennessee Walking Horse breed grew by leaps and bounds, was the fastest growing and largest breed of equines in America and was for all intents and purposes "America's horse." Roy Rogers and Dale Evans rode walkers in the old western films, and John Wayne rode on the back of walker – all ecstatic about the "glide ride" a walker provided – with no bumpiness like a pacer or trotter.

The walking horse was darn near perfect, and even President Lyndon B. Johnson traveled to Tennessee to present the World Grand Championship awards at the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration in Shelbyville – just one county over from Marshall County. The event was established in 1939 to crown the breed's champion but has always been a completely separate entity than TWHBEA

and governed by a corrupt group of local businessmen instead of horse people – something that I consider a detriment to the breed.

In 1950, the United States Department of Agriculture officially recognized the Tennessee Walking Horse as a distinct breed, and a few years later, soring began. Leave it to us humans to pervert one of God's perfect creations. Soring ran rampant, thus the stigma of the Tennessee Walking Horse being the most abused equine on earth began, and with it Tennessee has become known as the "Horse Abuse Capitol of the World."

The old-timers in the breed have said that Steve Hill, a well-known top trainer in the industry, utilized some chemical agents for the purpose of healing on Talk of the Town, the 1951, 1952 and 1953 World Grand Champion that was considered "unbeatable" by those competing against him.

None of the other horses performed quite like Talk of the Town, and trainers couldn't compete so more and more trainers began practicing this egregious abuse by utilizing mustard oil to burn the skin around the horses' ankles, and in some circumstances even placed barbwire around the ankle to create the reaction that later became known as the "big lick." After 15 or so years of rampant abuse, the federal government stepped in.

The legendary U.S. Senator Joe Tydings (D-MD), who passed away last month, joined by Howard Baker (R-TN), shepherded to passage the Horse Protection Act in 1970 to crack down on soring.

The Act was well intended, and the result of some compromises that marked the first federal law designed specifically to help the iconic American equines we all revere. But the law is needs of a serious upgrade because trainers have figured a way around the proscriptions in the law. In an ideal circumstance the Act should have eliminated to use of stacked shoes or pads, and action devices now known as ankle chains, but it didn't, and those devices are still highly utilized in 2018.

Veterinarian U.S. Reps. Ted Yoho (R-FL) and Kurt Schrader (D-OR), along with U.S. Senators Mike Crapo (R-ID), and Mark Warner (D-VA), have been leading bipartisan, bicameral legislation known as the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act, H.R. 1847/ S. 2957 that would close the loopholes in the Horse Protection Act by eliminating the large stacked shoes and ankle chains, increasing the penalties, and eliminating the industry's failed self-policing system by replacing it with licensed USDA contract inspectors, all at no cost to the taxpayer.

This is the third Congress in six years that this legislation has been introduced, and now has 285 Members of the House and 45 Members of the Senate as cosponsors. It's been stalled because a small group of Republicans from Tennessee

and Kentucky who continue to rake in campaign cash from violators of the HPA, but there is cause for optimism. Last week, the House Problem Solvers Caucus proposed that any bill with 290 cosponsors (2/3 of the House) should be brought to floor for a vote in the next Congress that begins in January, and we're only five away from having that number on the record in the next few weeks when the 115th Congress ends, and I believe we can get there. Please call your U.S. Members of the House at 202-224-3121 and ask them to join in cosponsoring the PAST Act, H.R. 1847 this week – the horses need you to take action.

Marty Irby is the executive director of Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C. and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association.

https://www.horsenation.com/2018/12/07/standing-ovation-by-ovation-riding-animal-wellness-action-supports-the-past-act/?fbclid=IwAR0DLdmvEY1w6BsII_DPP4HvEefO_mh8hAvNHD2JskSGIj0dYAhve935jw

The logo for Knox News. The word "knox" is in a bold, blue, sans-serif font, and "news." is in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

Opinion | Marsha Blackburn has a record of supporting, receiving funding from animal cruelty practices

Marty Irby Guest columnist

Published 4:00 p.m. ET Oct. 24, 2018 | Updated 9:18 a.m. ET Nov. 1, 2018

U.S. Rep. Marsha Blackburn has had a long career in politics and countless opportunities to demonstrate opposition to cruelty to animals. It's hard to believe that one lawmaker could perform as miserably on animal protection issues as she has in 16 years in Congress. She's become well known in animal protection circles around the U.S. as "Marsha Blackheart" because of her lack of caring for God's creatures and her defense of many forms of animal cruelty.

Blackburn has been the leading opponent of legislation to crack down on the barbaric practice of soring Tennessee Walking Horses, the intentional infliction of pain to horses' front feet that causes them to perform an exaggerated gait known as the "Big Lick." She's taken tens if not hundreds of thousands of dollars from those involved in this corrupt practice. These people have a long list of violations of the Horse Protection Act and deny that there is a problem even in the face of overwhelming evidence showing rampant abuses in Tennessee.

The Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act

After seeing an actual reform bill, the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, attract an astonishing 300 House co-sponsors, Blackburn introduced a phony reform bill, which the American Veterinary Medical Association described as "nothing more than an attempt to maintain the status quo in an industry riddled with abuse and will ensure that the broken system of seeing horses sored at an alarming rate does not have to answer for its crimes." The Tennessean's editorial board said that "Blackburn's legislation was the best that horse-abusers' money could buy, in the form of tens of thousands of dollars in contributions to her campaign, in order to continue torturing and maiming horses." She continued her persistence to keep soring alive, even after Bill Harlin, the proprietor of the famed Harlinsdale Farm in Franklin, Blackburn's own district, voiced his support to end soring and pass the PAST Act.

But her allegiance to a corrupt group of soring practitioners is not an aberration on animal cruelty issues. She's been hostile to other reforms, opposing efforts to create policies to protect pets and the people who care about them in natural disasters. Her vote against the PETS Act came in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, where thousands stayed behind and faced the storm because they didn't want to abandon their pets. More than 1,200 people died as the storm slammed into the Gulf Coast region.



Clant Seay, a Tennessee walking horse anti-soring activist, presents a 6,000-signature petition to Tom Womack, the Tennessee Department of Agriculture deputy commissioner, on Dec. 8, 2016. *Submitted*

Against amendment to stop abuse of cows

Blackburn voted against an amendment to stop the abuse of cows too sick or injured to walk and then dragged into slaughterhouses, putting consumers at risk of consuming diseased animals. The House defeated the amendment by the narrowest of margins, 199 to 202, and just months later, the USDA determined a cow slaughtered in Washington state had Mad Cow Disease. That cow was a “downer,” and if the ban on slaughtering “downers” had been in place, it would have never been dragged into the slaughterhouse and created a global food safety panic. This was the first finding of a cow with this disease in the U.S., and in response, more than 80 nations closed their markets to U.S. beef imports, causing a loss to the cattle industry in excess of \$10 billion.

Furthermore, Blackburn voted to oppose efforts to stop the slaughter of horses for human consumption, even though horses are given many drugs unfit for human consumption. She voted to block the Fish and Wildlife Service from

cracking down on the ivory trade, and she voted against efforts to stop the trade in primates for pets.

Horse-soring culprits hard to track

Opposed funding to enforce dogfighting laws

During consideration of the 2004 agriculture spending bill, Blackburn voted against an amendment to provide funding for enforcement of the recently upgraded law against dogfighting and cockfighting in America. And in 2018, Blackburn even voted to roll back a rule that had stopped the killing of wolves and bears in their dens; shooting grizzly bears by spotting them from airplanes and even shooting swimming caribou in national wildlife refuges and preserves. These are just a few examples as the list of her votes and actions against animals is far too long to share in one column.

As a former Tennessean, past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association, and a life-long Republican who cares about animals, I can't think of a worse representative for Tennessee to have in Washington than Blackburn; she's enabling misery and mistreatment for defenseless animals because she's pandering to narrow interests that exploit them. One should ask, if she doesn't care about innocent animals, even dogs and cats in a hurricane crisis, do you really think she cares about you? Tennesseans should step up against animal abuse and send an electoral verdict that cruelty is never acceptable.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association.

https://www.knoxnews.com/story/opinion/columnists/2018/10/24/marsha-blackburn-has-record-supporting-cruelty-animals-opinion/1725831002/?fbclid=IwAR0z_OWDRT95eBk_5GsBPQjkznxXzV6zGmNWx9jKdtb7F5bw6fSVRR1QaCA

Congressional delegation must stand up for Tennessee Walking Horses | Opinion

Marty Irby Guest Columnist

Published 6:00 p.m. CT Aug. 22, 2018

- For too long, elected officials have protected the Tennessee Walking Horse industry over the horses.
- Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C.



Horse trainer Carl Bledsoe looks at the feet of a Tennessee Walking Horse named Gen's Ice Glimmer at a farm in Middle Tennessee. *Shelley Mays / The Tennessean*

It's that time of year again in Shelbyville.

Each year, the month of August marks the occasion of the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration. It's one of a very few horse shows in the United States with a presence from the federal government. The reason is that trainers abuse horses, and there's a law against it.

But this year, it appears that the U.S. Department of Agriculture is hell bent on protecting equine abusers. Since the USDA hired Brian Klippenstein, the former leader of the anti-horse-welfare group known as Protect the Harvest, the department has allowed violators of the Horse Protection Act to run amuck. Soring, the painful practice inflicted on horses to induce a high-stepping gate, is rampant once again.

Political protectors, such as U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander and U.S. Rep. Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee, are watching out for their contributors in the industry rather than working to encourage proper enforcement of a federal anti-cruelty law.

For decades, political pressure from my fellow Republicans in Tennessee and Kentucky backed down the USDA, preventing the agency from enforcing the HPA as its 1970 sponsors intended.

The cases of abuse come one after another, and there is bipartisan legislation in Congress with more than 300 U.S. senators and representatives as cosponsors, that would crack down on the industry in a meaningful way and upgrade a 48-year-old law.

The Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, would eliminate the use of large, stacked shoes and ankle chains, create a uniform system for inspections, and increase the penalties for HPA violators.

As a former Tennessean, past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association, eight-time world champion and lifelong supporter of the Tennessee walking horse, I know firsthand how rampant soring is, and how the pro-soring coalition regularly calls on Members of Congress to help keep soring alive by blocking legislation, halting regulations and very publicly supporting the pro-soring coalition.

Blackburn, with a very big assist from Alexander and U.S. Rep. Scott DesJarlais has helped horse trainers, owners, and exhibitors keep the pain-based “big lick” exaggerated gait alive, instead of helping the industry shift back to its roots with the flat-shod sound and natural Tennessee Walking Horse that existed before soring plagued the sport.

The scofflaw trainers have gotten more sophisticated at inflicting pain on the horses and covering up the abuse, while the owners and exhibitors continue writing campaign contribution checks to thwart the progress of legislation that commands supermajorities in both the House and Senate.

TWHBEA membership declined from around 20,000 in 1997 to slightly over 5,700 in 2018. The number of mares bred declined from 26,148 in 2004 to

4,887 in 2017, and the number of foals registered declined from 15,042 in 2004 to a mere 2,388 in 2017.

Attendance at the national celebration has continued to plummet from the days of the famed He's Puttin' on the Ritz's 1996 record of 30,000-plus to less than half that number in recent years.



GALLERY: 31st Annual Mid-South Charity Walking Horse Show

So you might ask, why won't these people change? Regardless of the animal cruelty, don't the economics, and declines indicate the need for change? They don't care. They are addicted to the "big lick" no differently than alcoholic or adrenaline junkie.

I know because I used to be addicted to it too, but over the course of several years I broke the addiction and saw the industry for what it really is, a sort of pomp-and-circumstance cockfight with the feel of the barbaric games of ancient Rome.

If the enthusiasts for the breed and members of Congress from Tennessee really cared, they'd create a new celebration based on the sound natural gait of the horse, honest inspections and a level playing field.

It's long past time for the Tennessee delegation to stand up and do the right thing by supporting the PAST Act and cleaning up the industry in order to protect it in the decades ahead.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C. and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association.

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/opinion/2018/08/22/tennessee-walking-horse-needs-more-support-home-state-delegation/1064031002/>

knox news.

Marty Irby: 'Tradition' of torture isn't one Tennesseans should preserve

Marty Irby Guest columnist

Published 4:04 a.m. ET March 5, 2017



Marty Irby is senior adviser for the Humane Society Legislative Fund. *Submitted By Humane Society Of The United States Photo*



Already illegal under federal law, soring is still used by some trainers to deliberately injure the legs and hooves of Tennessee walking horses and related breeds to create the animals' high-stepping gait and give them an advantage at horse shows. *Submitted By Humane Society Of The United States*

As a former Tennessean, past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association, eight-time world champion and lifelong supporter of the Tennessee walking horse, I know firsthand how the rampant practice of soring has decimated the breed. The "Big Lick" pain-based gait created by soring is a “tradition” Tennesseans and Congress shouldn’t preserve.

When U.S. Sens. Howard Baker, R-Tennessee, and Joe Tydings, D-Maryland, worked to pass the Horse Protection Act in 1970, I doubt they imagined then-Baker legislative aide and future U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander would be discussing soring in the media, speaking against regulations to shore up the act and protect the horses in 2017.

It's been 47 years since the passage of the Horse Protection Act, and 37 years since elimination of the large, stacked shoes and ankle chains was first mentioned by U.S. Department of Agriculture in the Federal Register.

However, trainers have just gotten more sophisticated at inflicting pain on the horses and covering up the abuse, while the owners and exhibitors continue manipulating their political allies in an attempt to halt any progress. And now, long-awaited new regulations to strengthen the USDA's enforcement of the Horse Protection Act — by eliminating the failed system of industry self-policing and the use of soring devices — are in limbo. In a one-two punch, the Federal Register failed to publish them before the end of the Obama administration, and in its first hours the Trump administration issued a freeze on any new regulations.

As a lifelong Republican who's worked in Congress, I agree with Alexander on many issues but believe he's dead wrong on this one. I also question his data on the economy of the industry. TWHBEA memberships have declined from around 20,000 in 1997 to slightly over 6,500 in 2016. The number of mares bred declined from 26,148 in 2004 to 5,443 in 2013, and the number of horses registered declined from 15,042 in 2004 to a mere 3,178 in 2015. Attendance at the National Celebration has continued to plummet from the days of the famed He's Puttin' on the Ritz's 1996 record of 30,000-plus to less than half that number in recent years. In addition, stud fee prices have drastically declined, as is evident in TWHBEA's own long-term "sire of the year," whose fee was \$5,000 in 2007 and is \$2,500 in 2017.

Those are the real economics of the issue, and why the only way for the Tennessee walking horse to thrive and flourish is to step soundly into the future and embrace the changes that should have been made decades ago. It's the right thing to do.

The American people will no longer accept archaic, inhumane practices and the exploitation of animals in our modern-day society. This isn't ancient Rome, it's 2017. Tennesseans and walking horse enthusiasts should create a new tradition based on the sound natural gait of the horse, honest inspections and a level playing field for the horses, owners, trainers and exhibitors to enjoy.

More than 100,000 Americans submitted comments in support of the USDA regulations, and more than 300 bipartisan federal legislators co-sponsored the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act. It's time for Tennesseans to take back their breed, drain the swamp in Shelbyville and eliminate the pro-soring coalition that's perpetuated this abuse for more than half a century. Alexander may be well intended, but he's ill informed. I implore the White House and Congress to step up, make the breed great again by supporting the regulations in the PAST Act, and finally bringing an end to the abuse.

Marty Irby is senior adviser for the Humane Society Legislative Fund.

<https://www.knoxnews.com/story/opinion/columnists/2017/03/05/marty-irby-tradition-torture-isnt-one-tennesseans-should-preserve/98589348/>

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ANIMAL WELLNESS

ACTION ADVOCATE

MARTY IRBY

A LIFETIME DEDICATED TO SAVING
HORSES

Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, II recognized lifelong horseman and

Animal Wellness Action executive director Marty Irby “for his extraordinary efforts to reduce violence in the training of horses by adopting Monty Roberts’ concepts and initiatives.” Irby, a former 8-time world champion equestrian and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders’ & Exhibitors’ Association, was awarded a certificate of recognition, from Her Majesty via Royal Mail directly from Windsor Castle.

RECOGNIZED BY THE QUEEN

Only the second occasion in history that the British Crown has awarded certificates for equine protection work, Irby’s recognition follows the acknowledgment of eight horsemen and women the Queen recognized in 2012. The Royal Family planned to recognize Irby in person at Buckingham Palace, but the gathering and in-person presentation were postponed to a later date due to world events surrounding COVID-19.



“Marty Irby is our hero and has paid a huge price in his own life in the interest of being fair to the horses,” said Monty Roberts, founder of Join-Up International. “Along with thousands of supporters, Her Majesty and I strongly recommend the necessary rules and regulations to eliminate violence from this breed and all other competitions involving the horses we love.”

“I am deeply honored and grateful to Her Majesty, and my friend Monty Roberts for their recognition – working to help the voiceless horses we all care so deeply about has been the greatest honor and privilege of my life,” said Marty Irby, recipient of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, II’s Award. “I am certain that we will one day see the end of soring, doping, slaughter, and the use of whips in racing venues around the globe, and I hope that every horse

lover will join me, Monty, and Queen Elizabeth, II in helping eradicate all violence and abuse from the equine world.”

WORKING WITH THE HORSE WHISPERER

Irby first came to know and work with Monty Roberts, The Man Who Listens to Horses, in 2005 at Waterfall Farms, where Irby served as Director of Sales and Marketing. As a result of the influence of Queen Elizabeth II, Roberts began teaching Join-Up methods of natural horsemanship to Irby and his mentor, the late William B. Johnson, founder of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, LLC in an attempt to imprint Roberts’ principles of non-violent training and horsemanship upon the walking horse industry and eradicate the painful practice of “soring,” the intentional infliction of pain to Tennessee Walking Horses’ legs and feet by applying caustic chemicals such as mustard oil, croton oil, kerosene, and diesel fuel and inserting sharp objects in the horses’ hooves to create an exaggerated high-stepping gait known as the “big lick.”



For the past fifteen years, Irby has worked to transition the Tennessee Walking horse breed away from its painful past of soring, much of that time from within the ranks of the breed, and since 2013 he has championed the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act that would eliminate the use of large stacked shoes and ankle chains integral to the soring process; increase penalties for violators of the Horse Protection Act; and eliminate the breed's self-policing system, replacing it with inspectors licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

ANIMAL WELLNESS ACTION

Irby has also worked to end the rampant practice of doping American racehorses by pushing for passage of the Horseracing Integrity Act that would ban the use of drugs on race-day; worked to advance the Safeguard American Food Exports (SAFE) Act that would permanently end horse slaughter on American soil; worked to help provide funding for the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs' equine-assisted therapy program to help our American heroes with PTSD, and worked to help save our iconic American horses and burros from the Bureau of Land Management's mass round-ups and incarceration.

Irby testified before the U.S. House of Representatives in support of both the PAST Act in 2013 and Horseracing Integrity Act in 2020 and was recognized as one of The Hill's Top Lobbyists for 2019 following the passage of the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture (PACT) Act that was signed into law by President Trump in the Oval Office with Irby present for the ceremony. Irby resides in Washington, D.C., serves on the board of directors for Equine Collaborative International, LLC, the Organization for Competitive Markets, and the American Horse Protection Society, and his written works on equine protection have been published in dozens of outlets across the U.S.

WESTERN AG REPORTER

The Shame of the Walking Horse Industry

[Open Audio Article Player](#)

March 24, 2022

by Terra Ochsner

Cheating, scandal, and deception are three things that, unfortunately, find their way into any form of competition. Performance enhancing drugs have tarnished the reputations of far too many athletes, and unfortunately, the horse show industry is not immune to scandal and unethical practices which tarnish the spirit of competition and cause unnecessary suffering to the animals themselves.

On March 9, Animal Wellness Action (AWA), a non-profit political advocacy group who lobbies “to prevent cruelty to animals,” released a statement celebrating Congress’ “inclusion of the highest-ever funding levels of the Horse Protection Act (HPA) of 1970 in their final spending bill for FY 2022.”

Marty Irby, the executive director at AWA, and former president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders’ and Exhibitors’ Association, explained that the HPA was authored by the late Senator Joe Tydings (D-MD) with the intent of squelching the unethical practices in the walking horse show industry, known as soring.

According to the American Veterinary Medicine Association (AVMA), in the 1940’s and 1950’s walking horses were “light shod” in conjunction with “extensive training” in order to achieve the highly coveted “Big Lick” gait; this is a high stepping gait which “caught judges” fancy,” the AVMA wrote.

Because the Big Lick was being rewarded in the show arena, trainers started using other methods to enhance the movement.

“Weighted shoes, stacked pads, and weighted chains began to appear, and the methods quickly became more aggressive – heavier weights and chains, objects (e.g., tacks) placed against the sole of the hoof to induce pain, and the application of caustic substances on the pastern or coronary band to induce pain when those areas were rubbed with chain or roller bracelets,” the AVMA reported.

These methods are known as soring because they cause the horse to snatch their front legs upwards to “alleviate pain” and it brings its back up under itself to reduce weight on the injured limbs.

Chemical agents, such as kerosene, diesel, and WD-40 to name a few, are “applied to the pastern and coronary band region,” the AVMA report said. “Then, bracelet-like chains or rollers (“action devices”) are attached around the front of the pastern to rub against the skin and exacerbate the pain caused by the caustic agents.”



This is a photo of a typical "Performance Package" which is currently allowed at shows. Photo courtesy of Bradley Dick.

A 1980's study by Auburn University showed that the thermal patterns in the legs of horses who were subjected to chain application for two days, and it took roughly 20 days for thermal patterns to return to normal, AVMA said. A stallion who wore 8-ounce chains for a "brief training session" developed lesions.

Physical soring practices include "grinding down the sole to expose sensitive tissues, making the hoof wall shorter than the sole, inserting hard objects between the shoe and the pad, standing the horse on raised blocks" or in some cases, purposefully causing laminitis.

Currently, there are "Performance Packages" which are permitted for use at shows. These "include a variety of mechanical pads, "stacks," bolts, and heel springs that may be attached to the hoof. Pads currently in use may be up to 4" thick in the heel and more than 2" at the toe," and pads and chains used by weigh no more than six ounces, AVMA stated.



This x-ray shows the excessive use of nails used to attach a "Performance Package" and inflict unnecessary pain on the horse. Photo courtesy of USDA.

AVMA studies have shown that placing horses on these stacked shoes can cause over-exertion and stumbling, and pads/wedges have caused inflammation in the flexor tendons. Additionally, action devices, like the bracelets and chains which are permitted for use, cause hair loss and lesions, even if they are only six ounces as currently allowed.

So, for Marty Irby and the AWA, it was a cause for celebration when Congress allocated \$3,040,000 for the HPA. Irby has worked with the HPA for over 20 years,

and has personally been a part the progress made towards this “unprecedented” funding.

“From 1970 to 2019, They never had more than \$705,000 for enforcement of the HPA in nearly 50 years,” he said.

This money has been used to fund USDA inspections at shows in order to oversee inspections being done to determine whether horses were healthy and able to perform, or if illegal soring had taken place.

Irby, who was actually an eight-time world champion in the Tennessee Walking Horse industry, said that the USDA does “a terrible job at” enforcing the HPA. “They grant authority to inspection services called Horse Industry Organizations, and there are five or six now, and they are all private entities.”

There are major conflicts of interest with these private inspection because individuals from these private entities can be seen showing sored horses one weekend, and then they are in charge of inspecting at a show the next, Irby said. “The USDA can show up and go to a horse at any time they want to see if the inspectors are doing their job.”

However, a majority of the time USDA comes to a show, “the people at the horse show pack up their stuff and leave [...] the inspections now are just a joke, a sham,” Irby argued.

Of the \$3,040,000 in funds allocated this year, a large portion will go towards ensuring the USDA has a more hands-on approach to these inspections during the show season, “or at least be there at every show like you would have a USDA inspector at slaughterhouses across America,” Irby said.

Additionally, \$300,000 will be dedicated toward “effective, science-based testing” to prevent the possibility of corrupt inspections.

“I’ve seen inspections that are completely unfair in both directions where horses were turned away that weren’t sore” and vice versa, because exhibitors or trainers had bribed the inspectors, Irby explained. This objective testing would include blood tests, radiographs, and swabbing for banned substances and provide clear insight into horses who have been subjected to soring.

Aside from bribery, other methods are used to get through soring inspections. According to the AVMA, “trainers [sometimes apply] local anesthetics or [use] distracting devices that cause pain elsewhere on the body. Occasionally, horses are switched so that the inspectors do not inspect the same horse that enters the ring. Additionally, horses may have been “stewarded” prior to presentation for inspection (i.e. trained to not react to palpation that would normally elicit pain by repeated beating and/or use of an electric prod).”

Finally, the plan for the rest of the HPA funds is to prosecute offenders more effectively and in a more timely fashion. Currently, soring is simply a misdemeanor offense, and often times, offenders receive a short suspension or a \$2,500 fine. Between 2019-2020, Irby recalled, “there were trainers who were in their 70’s who had violations for soring and violating the HPA, and it took five years for the USDA to finally get around to punishing them.”

By the time the sanctions were given, which came in the form of two-year suspensions for their offenses from roughly 2014, those trainers were in their late 70’s and close to retiring anyways, Irby said. One of the most notable violations came in 2012 when Jackie McConnell, one of the sport’s top trainers, was caught on video brutally abusing and soring his horses. His punishment was 10 months of house arrest and a three-year probation period.

“In everything, someone is going to cheat. It’s unfortunate that, in the horse world, it seems like everybody cheats, and it becomes a sort of a game of who can out cheat each other,” Irby stated. “That’s a big part of why we wanted to go after more funding, so that USDA would have the resources to be able to crack down on these folks.”

Animal Wellness Action was also key in passing the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act of 2020 which looks to combat banned substance use in the horse racing industry. This legislation will go into effect on July 1, 2022.

<https://www.westernagreporter.com/articles/the-shame-of-the-walking-horse-industry/>



Unconventional Activist

Meat-Eating, Animal Rights Republican Lobbyist Lost Everything to Find a New Purpose

11/29/2021 | 12:11 PM CST



By [Victoria G. Myers](#), Progressive Farmer Senior Editor



Marty Irby continues to fight for tougher penalties for horse soring, among a mix of other animal welfare issues, as one of Washington, D.C.'s most effective lobbyists. (DTN/Progressive Farmer photo by Joel Reichenberger)

Not so long ago Marty Irby described his life as a bad country music song.

"I went bankrupt, lost my business, my father and I didn't speak for five years, my wife and I divorced, and I had death threats," said Irby.

His fall was hard and fast. Irby was a key member of the tightly controlled and lucrative world of horse shows and thoroughbreds. He won equestrian world championships and held the office of president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association from 2010 to 2012. But his public stand supporting legislation to ban soring, a commonly used training tool, was seen as a major betrayal.

Soring is an intentional infliction of pain to a horse's legs or hooves to force it to use an exaggerated gait. It takes different forms, but Irby noted it goes back to the 1950s, when trainer Winston Wiser deduced that liniments that irritated a horse's feet would also cause it to step higher in response to the pain. The gait in Tennessee Walkers, known today as a Big Lick, turned heads and won ribbons in the ring.

"Eventually, someone figured out what Wiser was doing and they copied it. So, what you see is not natural," said Irby of the gait. "Naturally, maybe the greatest horse might be able to step one-third as high as what we see."

Today soring isn't limited to the use of irritating liniments and caustic chemicals that blister the skin, adds Irby. It can include pressure shoeing or forcing a horse to stand for hours with the sensitive part of his sole on a block or raised object.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) came out against soring decades ago. The group describes the practice in all its forms as inhumane and unethical and notes it has long been associated with violations of federal law under the Horse Protection Act of 1970 (HPA). The HPA made it illegal for sored horses to participate in shows, sales, exhibitions or auctions, and prohibited transporters from shipping sored horses to or from these events. Enforcement of HPA falls under USDA authority, but the agency has blamed budget limitations for limited inspections and convictions.

DANGEROUS STANDS, ROYAL RECOGNITION

Proponents of the practice of soring have never been very forgiving of those who publicly oppose their choice of training method.

Irby, an eight-time world champion equestrian rider, said he received death threats after testifying before Congress in 2013 on behalf of legislation to ban soring.

He decided to stay in Washington, D.C. and start a new career working for a Kentucky congressman as press secretary, communications director, and legislative aide. Later he went to the Humane Society of the U.S. as a lobbyist. In 2018, Irby and others created the Animal Wellness Action group, where he's been ever since.

Irby's decision to stand up for the welfare of horses laid a foundation for his work as a well-known Capitol Hill lobbyist, a job he's been recognized for multiple times over the years.

He also received royal attention in 2020, when Queen Elizabeth II honored Irby for his activism on behalf of horses. Renowned American horse trainer Monty Roberts, a founder of Join-Up International, a non-profit that promotes gentle, effective alternatives to violence and force in both equine and human relationships, publicly congratulated Irby on the honor.

"Marty Irby is our hero and has paid a huge price in his own life in the interest of being fair to the horses. Along with thousands of supporters, Her Majesty and I strongly recommend the necessary rules and regulations to remove violence from this breed and all other competitions involving the horses we love."

OVERACHIEVER FOR WELFARE

Within the animal welfare community, Irby admitted he has a reputation for being more than a little unconventional. He is a self-described "meat-eating Republican, animal welfare lobbyist," which even on a good day doesn't earn him a lot of love from either side of the political divide.

"I'm not a vegan. I'm not a vegetarian. I'm about raising animals humanely, where they only have one bad day in their lives. My heroes are people like Pete Eshelman, a Wagyu beef producer in Indiana who keeps his cows up in a barn at night where they listen to old baseball games; and Georgia's Will Harris, of Whiteoak Pastures where the focus is on sustainability and soil regeneration. These, and farms like them, epitomize the best of America's livestock producers."

Irby's approach as a lobbyist has been highly effective. In 2019, he was at the Oval Office to watch President Donald Trump sign the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act. It was one of six bills signed during Trump's presidency, all containing issues Irby had lobbied for. He jokingly told reporters that his time in Washington has given him a lot of ideas for a book. The working title: "Crazy Animal People."

A MARRIAGE OF POLICIES

Irby's ability to laugh at himself, and sometimes those within the world of animal welfare, puts him in a unique position to help the nation's livestock producers.

Georgia cattleman Will Harris has known Irby about 10 years and describes him as "a wonderful ally." He said the two came together over compassion and animal welfare, as well as the need to see land regeneration management used to rebuild impoverished rural communities.

Harris, known to be a bit of a farm philosopher, believes most animal welfare advocates have a shallow view of their relationship with the animal kingdom.

"Many of them have a view that all animal relationships are the same as they would have with a companion animal. I have a companion animal, Judge. He's laying at my feet while we talk. But then I add another kind of relationship with the animal kingdom, one that is more complex. Livestock, working animals, wildlife ... these are different kinds of relationships. To say they are all the same is shallow. Marty gets that."

Harris calls Irby "a bridge between people like me and people who view every relationship with an animal at that companion level."

"They have a contempt for those of us who produce livestock. We need people to bridge that gap, and Marty Irby has worked hard to do it. It's a very different world he works in than where I live here in rural Georgia."

Despite how different that Capitol Hill world is, this unconventional animal welfare rights lobbyist has found his place in it.

"I think everyone in agriculture has a big job ahead of them today," said Irby. "One of the biggest problems we have in Washington, D.C. is that so many of our politicians have sold out the family farmer and animal welfare with policies they've created. I am here to say you can absolutely have a happy marriage between animal welfare policies and raising animals for food. That's what I fight for every day."

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<https://www.dtnpf.com/agriculture/web/ag/news/article/2021/11/29/meat-eating-animal-rights-republican>



The Battle to End Soring Gets a Boost

US Congress is providing record-breaking funding to help end the cruel and painful practice of "soring" in the gaited horse show world.



(©Clarence Alford - stock.adobe.com)

By: Kim Izzo | October 27, 2021

The Tennessee Walking Horse, Hackney, and Saddlebred are breeds that are synonymous with their iconic high-stepping gait. Competitors have historically done better in the showring with horses that have the most exaggerated form of this gait, known as the “big lick”. Nowhere is this more coveted than in Tennessee Walking Horse shows in the southeastern United States, particularly Tennessee and Kentucky.

But the history of this breed of high steppers is controversial. While the breed has a natural level of high step, to increase it for the showring many trainers resort to what is called “soring.”

Soring is defined as “the intentional infliction of pain to horses front limbs to induce an artificial high-step,” or “big lick.”

The advocacy group Animal Wellness Action (AWA) [who run a campaign](#) to ban the practice, has a more detailed description on its website: “The abusive practice of “soring” is when morally bankrupt trainers intentionally inflict pain on a Tennessee Walking Horse’s hooves and legs to force the horses to perform an exaggerated, high-stepping gait to obtain an unfair advantage at horse shows. Caustic chemicals are applied, and plastic wrap is used to cook the chemicals directly into the horse’s flesh for several days. Chains are attached to strike the wounds, and screws and nails are driven into the sensitive tissue of their hooves with the purpose of causing pain that will cause the horses to raise their legs and perform the exaggerated gait. These horses are subjected to constant severe pain.”

There has been a movement to ban soring in the US, starting with the Horse Protection Act (HPA) in 1970, which always lacked adequate funding for enforcement. Adding to the fight for a ban, was the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act which passed through the U.S. House in 2019. Again, enforcement was an issue.

But that changed this year when Congress included in its appropriations, increased highest funding for the HPA, with The House approving \$3,400,000 for 2022, and a Senate bill providing an additional \$2,340,000, also for 2022. This is a major leap forward, prior to 2019, the federal funding never got past \$700,000.

AWA, formed in 2018, has worked to get the increased funding. The horse industry and animal rights community have known that a dearth of HPA funding for enforcement has allowed soring events to continue unchecked in Tennessee and Kentucky. AWA also worked to secure HPA funding for 2020 in the amount of \$1,000,000, and \$2,009,000 for this year. The AWA has worked closely with leaders in the Tennessee Walking Horse industry who’ve admitted that the cruel practice needs to stop, as well as members of the Tennessee and Kentucky Congressional Delegations.

“We applaud appropriators in Congress for responding to our pleas to end soring by providing record-breaking funding to wipe-out this painful scourge that’s marred the show horse world since the 1950’s,” Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action, and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders’ & Exhibitors’ Association who was honored by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II in 2020 for his work to end soring, said in a press release. “While legislation that would also help stamp out soring continues to

flounder in Congress, we remain steadfast in exploring new avenues and opportunities to work with leaders in the breed on provisions that we can all agree upon.”

The practice isn’t exclusive to Tennessee Walkers either, soring has also been a blight on the Alabama Racking Horse breed too. So it was no surprise that one of the senators who backed the budget increase, Senate Appropriations Ranking Member, Richard Shelby, a Republican, hails from Alabama.

The increase funding will go a long way towards enforcing the PAST Act, the goals of which are clearly written on the AWA site, preventing the industry’s “self-policing, banning the use of large, stacked shoes and ankle chains, strengthening penalties, and making it illegal to sore a horse for the purpose of showing or selling it.”

We hope to be reporting on the progress of the PAST Act in the future.

<https://horse-canada.com/horse-news/the-battle-end-soring-gets-boost/>

The logo for the Chattanooga Times Free Press, featuring the name in a white, stylized, gothic-style font on a dark grey rectangular background.The Yahoo! News logo, with "yahoo!" in purple and "news" in black, both in a bold, sans-serif font.

OPINION: Tennessee walking horse time still means soring

Pam Sohn, Chattanooga Times Free Press, Tenn.

Fri, August 27, 2021, 8:01 PM·5 min read

Aug. 27 — It's walking horse time in Tennessee. Better put, it's save the horses time in Tennessee.

Those words, a take-off on the legendary and late John Ward's opener to Tennessee football games, once was another welcome to Tennessee and southern tradition — the 10-day Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration that commences in the last weeks of August and ends around Labor Day.

But in recent decades, as the hoof "pads" grew taller and heavier on the front feet of our beautiful and gentle Tennessee walking horses and training shortcuts became more gruesome, the public image of Tennessee walking horses took a dark turn.

Most of America was introduced to the walking horse abuse in 2012 when undercover video aired on prime-time television offering a glimpse into the barns and training methods, known as "soring," of former Hall of Fame trainer Jackie McConnell. The video resulted in McConnell's and others' eventual guilty pleas and federal conviction in Chattanooga and Nashville courtrooms.

Soring is pain-treating a walking horse's front hooves and legs with burning chemicals and objects hidden beneath and around the heavy pads. With the increasing use of those immoral training methods, the graceful rocking gait of Tennessee walking horses became the uneasy lurch of the "big lick." But the big lick is simply an indicator that the horses' feet or legs are so painful that the animals try to make unnaturally high reaches to avoid putting their sore hooves on the ground.

The industry claimed McConnell was just one of a few "bad apples". But later that year, despite an industry claim that it had cleaned up its act, USDA inspectors reported that federal testing in the final days of Shelbyville's Celebration revealed 145 horses out of 190 — 76% — tested positive for the prohibited foreign substances used in soring.

This year, for the sixth consecutive year, a group of horse lovers calling themselves the Citizens Campaign Against "Big Lick" Animal Cruelty is peacefully assembling and protesting the Celebration. And they are putting yet another spin on John Ward's iconic Volunteer State pronouncement. They say: "It's boycott time in Tennessee."

The group, organized by Clant Seay, who raised Tennessee Walking Horse World Grand Champions and contenders from 1981 to 2005, is making headway not just by boycotting the Celebration, but also other smaller shows around the country. With their doggedness, they keep making the public aware that flat-shod walking horses are, all by themselves, a better show than abused big lickers.

They recently brought a spotlight to the Lions Clubs of America by boycotting the Woodbury Tennessee Lion's Club fundraiser, which featured 24 classes of "Big Lick" horses. The show's judge and official farrier both had previously pleaded guilty and been sentenced on horse soring charges.

The boycotters and their public awareness campaign, in fact, are doing more to protect horses than our Congress does, but we'll get to our lawmakers later.

Here's a gauge of what that public awareness has meant.

Some 20 years ago, 30,000 people attended the final Saturday night of the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration in Shelbyville. In 2019, fewer than 25,000 people attended the entire 10-day event.

And in 2000, the breed registry of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association had just over 22,000 members. In 2020, TWHBEA could boast only 2,450 members — a decline of almost 90%.

Soring was first outlawed by the Horse Protection Act's passage in the 1970s, but it's an open secret that the law has loopholes a herd of horses regularly run through.

That brings us to our Congress, which seems to have no problem with horse abuse.

Newer legislation, the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act, better known as the PAST Act, was first introduced in 2013 and had overwhelming lawmaker support. Support — but not votes.

For almost a decade, the bill, which would have done away entirely with the nearly 8-pound stack shoes and chains, as well as the chemicals used to make the horses flail their hooves, was reintroduced over and over, only to

be repeatedly held up in committees, thanks to the opposition of the Tennessee and Kentucky horse industry and our lawmakers.

In 2019, the PAST Act did finally pass the House of Representatives by 333-96. (Of course, almost all of Tennessee's, Georgia's and Alabama's Republican representatives voted no — including Chuck Fleischmann. Democrats voted yes.) But to this day, the measure continues to be held hostage in the Senate, kept from a vote by Tennessee's Lamar Alexander and later by Tennessee's Marsha Blackburn and by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky.

In June, the PAST Act was reintroduced again, but languishes.

Marty Irby, a former TWHBEA president and self-described reformed sorer now is Animal Wellness Action's chief lobbyist. He says he fears the PAST Act is dead and will never pass. The key to reform, he thinks, is changing people's attitudes about what is more entertaining — a lurching sored horse or a graceful flat-shod walker going through its natural smooth gaits.

This brings us back to the tireless protesters with their signs and petitions in Shebyville. Look them up at billygoboy.com. They have plenty of protest signs you can hold and petitions you can sign.



Animal Rights and Wrongs

Posted on June 28, 2021 by Thomas Becnel



Horseman becomes activist in Washington, D.C.

After graduating from the University of South Alabama in 2003, Marty Irby worked in real estate and won equestrian world championships before becoming president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association.

When he went public with criticism of "soring," which uses pain to train horses in a distinct walking style, his career in Tennessee was over.

"I felt a lot of backlash – it was very ugly," said Irby, a 42-year-old native of Mobile. "People stopped doing business with me. I had a development and construction company at the time, and most of my clients were horse people, so our business went under. I was getting all kinds of death threats and terrible things."

He fled to Washington, D.C., and wound up starting a second career as a press secretary and legislative aide for a Kentucky congressman. Irby became "the horse guy" in Congress. Then he worked as a lobbyist and helped start the Animal Rights Action organization.

Now he lives in a 650-square-foot apartment three blocks from Capitol Hill. He jokes about being a meat-eating Republican in a political movement dominated by what he calls vegan leftists.

That's his niche.

"There's no one like me – I'm it," he said, laughing. "Actually, there is one other Republican animal rights lobbyist, and I'm the one who hired her."

Irby's success in lobbying has been noted by The Hill newspaper in Washington, D.C. His animal rights activism was honored by Queen Elizabeth II in 2020. Celebrated horse trainers joined in her praise.

"Marty Irby is our hero and has paid a huge price in his own life in the interest of being fair to the horses," said Monty Roberts, founder of Join-Up International. "Along with thousands of supporters, Her

Majesty and I strongly recommend the necessary rules and regulations to remove violence from this breed and all other competitions involving the horses we love.”

Irby grew up in Mobile and attended the UMS-Wright Preparatory School. At the age of four, he became a competitive equestrian. He won his first world championship at the age of 24.

At South, Irby went to school while working full-time in his family’s real estate business. It took him six years to earn a degree in communications, but he says that training has been valuable in business and politics.

“My writing skills, that’s something I use every day,” Irby said. “At Animal Wellness Action, I don’t have a communications director. I do my own press work. I’ve had articles published in all kinds of national publications.”

During his time at South, Irby joined the Sigma Chi fraternity and served as president of the Young Republicans of Mobile. In that office, he followed Clay Barclay, president of BAC Adjusting in Mobile, who became a business partner and political ally.

Irby’s lobbying career came as a surprise to some of his friends.

“It was different – I didn’t expect it – but he found a passion,” Barclay said. “When he finds something he has a passion for, he attacks it like crazy. He’s probably been the most effective animal rights activist ever. He got President Trump to sign, what, seven bills?”

Irby says it was six bills, actually, ranging from the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act to the Rescuing Animals with Rewards Act. He lobbied Lara Trump, the president’s daughter-in-law, suggesting that animal rights were a good political issue with suburban voters.

In 2019, he was invited to the Oval Office, where President Trump signed the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act.

“It was surreal, completely surreal,” he said. “We were the last group of the day and he spent like an hour with us. Kellyanne Conway was there and Pam Bondi – she’s a good friend and animal person. And then he’s like, where’s Lara? She’s not here. Let’s get Lara on the speaker phone. He’s sitting there at the Resolute desk, and I’m short, so I’ve got my right hand on the Resolute desk during this whole deal, and I got to say my little piece on national television.”

Irby says that bill signing will be a good story for a book about his experiences in Alabama, Tennessee and Washington. He has about five chapters written. His working title is “Crazy Animal People.”

“I think it’s catchy,” he said. “I bought the website and applied for the trademark.”

Irby returns home to Mobile about four times a year. He visits his grandmother and catches up with old friends. He likes to eat at Morrison’s Cafeteria and the Big Time Diner.

Alabama politics is one of his passions. He’s considered running for office. He talks about moving home to South Alabama.

People kept telling Irby he needed a hobby, so he began collecting rare coins during the coronavirus pandemic. He also adopted a rescue dog named Spencer.

In Washington, D.C., his life revolves around politics, but Irby has to laugh when he’s described as a Washingtonian.

"I am not a swamp rat," he joked. "I've lived here eight years, but I feel like I'm pretty in touch with people outside the Beltway. I'm very anti-establishment."

<https://www.southalabama.edu/departments/alumni/news/irby.html>



COURTHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

Trainers Given Fines for 'Sored' Horses Will Get New Hearings

The highly technical decision out of the D.C. Circuit turns on the illegal appointments of the administrative law judges who handed down the fines.

KAILA PHILO / February 16, 2021



Casey Wright rides the horse named "I Am Jose" at the 2013 Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration, using soring devices to that passed

USDA inspection at the time to accomplish what is known as the "Big Lick" movement. (Photo by Randall R. Saxton, creative commons, via Courthouse News)

WASHINGTON (CN) — In the fall of 2017, federal agricultural authorities took aim at a trio of horse trainers, Joe Fleming, Sam Perkins and Jarrett Bradley, accused of entering injured animals into competition for an unfair advantage.

The Horse Protection Act of 1960 imposes penalties on those who engage in the practice known as “soring,” where an irritant is used to exaggerate a horse’s gait, creating an effect called a “[big lick](#).” It can be achieved artificially by burning a horse’s front hooves with chemical agents like mustard oil, diesel fuel, croton oil or kerosene, or tightly nailing on a shoe to cause pain when the horse puts weight on its foot.

The practice is often used to achieve higher steps during performances in Walking Horse shows, sales and auctions, which are common in Tennessee, where Fleming operates.

Both animal welfare groups and veterinary organizations have denounced the practice as unethical.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has repeatedly come under fire from both anti-soring groups and pro-soring coalitions for opposing reasons, but they both agree on one thing: “The USDA has failed miserably at doing their job of enforcing the Horse Protection Act for the past half a century,” Marty Irby, executive director of Animal Wellness Action, said over the phone.

When the agency ruled against them, Fleming and the other trainers appealed to the D.C. Circuit. [Ordering a new hearing](#) for them Tuesday, that court ruled that the judicial officer overseeing their case was unlawfully appointed.

Chief U.S. Circuit Judge Sri Srinivasan wrote the majority opinion on behalf of a divided three-judge panel. The decision turns on recent Supreme Court precedent from the case [Lucia v. SEC](#), which found that administrative law

judges (ALJs), such as those who heard the Fleming case, are “inferior officers” under the Appointments Clause, meaning they must be installed by either the president, the head of the department or a court of law.

In a brief for the Fleming case last year, the [Cato Institute](#) argued that the three ALJs in the Agriculture Department wield “exceptional authority” among the nearly 2,000 ALJs then employed by the federal government. Cato also argued that the program’s constitutional flaws were “too interconnected to allow for half measures,” like severing the removal protections of the Agriculture Department ALJs.

“To fix everything with one order, the court would have to rewrite the stature,” Ilya Shapiro and William Yeatman wrote in [that brief](#). “Addressing the Agriculture Department’s unconstitutional enforcement scheme is a job for lawmakers, not judges.”

Another group that filed an amicus brief on behalf of the horse trainers was the New Civil Liberties Alliance.

“When judges abdicate their power to fulfill their constitutional role as a check on the executive branch, that creates a power vacuum,” Jared McClain, a litigation counsel at NCLA, said over the phone, “shifting more power from the judiciary and making the executive branch stronger.”

In a statement Tuesday, the group highlighted a partial dissent penned Tuesday by U.S. Circuit Judge Neomi Rao, which says the court’s failure to act has trapped “petitioners in an administrative-judicial hall of mirrors... The majority allows the government to argue before the agency that constitutional questions should be left to the courts and then argue before this court that constitutional questions should be left to the agency.”

Irby considers Tuesday's ruling another setback in the long fight against soring. "This is a very tragic decision, but it falls right in line with so many other cases that the pro-soring coalition in Tennessee have won for decades," he said.

Animal welfare activists believe that the Horse Protection Act is improperly enforced, letting trainers implicated by the law wiggle out of trouble through technicalities.

One controversial case that comes to Irby's mind is that of Honors, the black stallion who won the World Grand Championship in 2016. Honors was disqualified from competing several times between 2013 and 2015 when the USDA found evidence of past soring. His owners, brothers Keith and Dan McSwain, sued the USDA in 2016 by arguing that their due process had been violated, and a federal judge in Georgia ruled in their favor, paving the way for Honors' 2016 win.

Tuesday's decision only further muddies a long and bitter fight over the rights of horses and the rights of their trainers.

<https://www.courthousenews.com/trainers-given-fines-for-sored-horses-will-get-new-hearings/>



Breaking the Chains of the Tennessee Walking Horses

Supporters of a new reform effort want to get it through the Senate to eliminate chains, weighted shoes and other abuses.



Advocates of long-overdue change in the industry want to see the use of chains and 'stacks' eliminated. (©Clarence Alford – stock.adobe.com)

By: Kim Izzo | December 2, 2020

Monty Roberts, world-renowned horseman and author of *The Man Who Listens to Horses*, continues to lead the charge against the practice of 'soring' in the highly competitive world of **Tennessee Walking Horses**. He is joined by other high-profile supporters of change including Marty Irby, the executive director of Animal Wellness Action and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association.



For those of you who don't know, soring refers to the cruel practice of inflicting pain on the Tennessee Walker's feet in order to achieve the desirable gait known as the "Big Lick" movement. Tools of the cruel trade include large stacked shoes and ankle chains to create lingering pain so the horse steps higher and snappier.

Further indignities for the sake of "aesthetics" include the horse's tail tendons being severed, and the horse having to endure living with a tail set in a device that maintains a full break. The horses are then forced to endure further pain with the use of a "U" shaped stand under the tail to keep it in the high-crested shape that the breed is known for.

For the past 15 years, fans of the horse's natural beauty and gaits, as well as animal welfare advocates, have stepped up efforts to have such practices banned. In 2013 the [Prevent All Soring Tactics \(PAST\) Act](#) was introduced into the House of Congress in Washington. It passed in 2019 with an overwhelming vote of 333 to 96. However, the bill has since languished in the Senate since July 2020 when it was read and sent to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation for review. Roberts says the political reality is that the bill is "dead in the Senate."



Monty Roberts.

Now Roberts and allies are going to put forward another bill with the hopes this one will pass all the way and become law. According to press reports, the revised bill is still being worked on but will include eliminating chains, a 50% reduction in the use of weighted shoes, having science-based and objective inspections to replace the industry's self-policing program, assessing felony-level penalties, and eliminating entirely the use of tail braces that have been in use since 1939.

While certain Tennessee Walking Horse trainers stubbornly adhere to these inhumane methods, there is increasing support to embrace a natural way of going, including the introduction of trail pleasure classes which have been very popular.

"We applaud those who are stepping up for the Tennessee Walking Horse, and we are grateful to all of the people who have joined together to finally end the scourge of soring," Roberts wrote in an article in *USA Today*. "We firmly believe there are no bad Tennessee Walking Horses. It is only the human element that has caused the Big Lick discipline to be a bad one."

Watch a video posted by the voice for the breed, the [All American Walking Horse Alliance](#) in 2015 to promote the previous PAST Act (Caution: disturbing images):



Tags: [All American Walking Horse Alliance](#), [Big Lick](#), [equine welfare](#), [inhumane practices](#), [Marty Irby](#), [Monty Roberts](#), [Tennessee Walking Horses](#),

<https://horse-canada.com/horse-news/breaking-chains-tennessee-walking-horses/>

On the 50th Anniversary of the Horse Protection Act, there is still much work to do

By **MELANIE SAVAGE**

HARTFORD COURANT

DEC 14, 2020 AT 11:27 AM

The beautiful Tennessee Walking Horse is a breed often targeted by the cruel soring practices that the Horse Protection Act, and the Prevent All Soring Practices Act, seek to eliminate.

PLAINFIELD — December 9, marks 50 years since President Richard M. Nixon signed into law the Horse Protection Act (HPA), authored by the late U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings, D-M.D.

“While cause for celebration, the anniversary is also a reminder that the HPA has not been improved in 50 years,” reads a statement sent out jointly by Animal Wellness Action (AWA), the Animal Wellness Foundation (AWF), Center for a Humane Economy (CHE), American Horse Protection Society, Join-Up International, and the Horses for Life Foundation.



The beautiful Tennessee Walking Horse is a breed often targeted by the cruel soring practices that the Horse Protection Act, and the Prevent All Soring Practices Act, seek to eliminate.

The statement goes on to read that there has been an accord between key allies and adversaries of the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 693, providing a potential pathway in the waning days of the 116th Congress to dramatically strengthen the federal law against soring.

According to the Humane Society of the U.S. (HSUS), soring involves the intentional infliction of pain to a horse's legs or hooves in order to force the horse to perform an artificial, exaggerated gait. Caustic chemicals such as mustard oil, diesel fuel and kerosene, are applied to a horse's limbs, causing

extreme pain and suffering. Another form of soring, known as pressure shoeing, involves cutting a horse's hoof almost to the quick, and forcing the horse to stand on the sore foot, or nailing on a tightly-fitting shoe.

"Soring has been a common and widespread practice in the Tennessee walking horse show industry for decades," according to the HSUS web site, noting that to this day, judges continue to reward the artificial "Big Lick" gait, thus encouraging participants to sore their horses and allowing the cruel practice to persist.



This photo from the Animal Wellness Action web site shows painful chains and unnaturally-angled shoes that horses might be forced to wear in an effort to produce the gait preferred by "Big Lick" judges.

Hay Burr Inn Equine Rescue owner and founder, Cynthia Haberin, said that, while she is very much aware of the practice of soring, it is not an area in which her organization is particularly active. "We do not have these shows...in

new England much,” said Haberin. “Unfortunately we can only get behind so much, as animal cruelty is awful everywhere.”

The Plainfield-based Hay Burr Inn is a 501(c)(3) equine rescue dedicated to rescue slaughter-bound, abused or neglected equine companions. While the “Big Lick” horse shows take place mostly in the south, and other areas outside of New England, Haberin said she is very much aware of the suffering the practice of soring causes animals. In addition to burning or otherwise injuring a horse’s legs or feet, Haberin said the practice also may involve adding weights from chains and heavy shoes.

“Very cruel,” said Haberin. “Makes horses lift legs higher, but is horrible, unnatural, and cruel. How it’s allowed is beyond me...”

“Today, we commemorate the signing of the very first law designed to protect our nation’s treasured iconic equines and we honor the primary Senate author of the legislation – the great Joe Tydings of Maryland,” said Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action.

Animal Wellness Action is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) organization with a mission of helping animals by promoting legal standards forbidding cruelty. The organization champions causes that alleviate the suffering of companion animals, farm animals, and wildlife.

The law initiated by Senator Tydings fails to protect horses the way it should. “The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) continues to coddle and tolerate serious violations of the Horse Protection Act (HPA), meting out token and virtually meaningless penalties for people who’ve repeatedly harmed Tennessee Walking Horses in order to win ribbons at horse shows,” reads a statement released in March of 2019 by Irby.

“The people who participate [in Big Lick shows] are rich and donate heavily,” said Haberin, by way of explanation.

In July of 2019, the House passed the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 693, a measure that would ban large, stacked shoes and ankle chains in the showring, create a modernized inspection program, and increase penalties for violators of the Horse Protection Act (HPA) of 1970. But, more than 16 months after passage of the legislation, and tremendous work to achieve a consensus on compromise legislation that would have largely accomplished the objectives of the PAST Act, the Senate hasn’t taken even the first step of action.

“The 50th anniversary of the Horse Protection Act (HPA) is a reminder that good legislation often becomes outdated, which necessitates contemporary reforms. Such is the case with the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, which aims to end the horrific abuse of horse soring.” said Allondra Stevens, founder of the Horses for Life Foundation.

Horses For Life Foundation is an advocacy and education group dedicated to ending the slaughter of American horses, protecting wild horses and burros on public lands, and ending equine abuse and neglect through advocacy, public education, and legislative reform.

“Following the victorious passage of the bill in the U.S. House, its only path through the U.S. Senate is through modifications made to the language that include; a ban on chains and other action devices, prohibits barbaric tail braces, and raises penalties to a felony,” continued Stevens. “We hope our federal lawmakers will end the 50-year cap on the HPA by passing the revised PAST Act in the 116th Congress.”

Melanie Savage

Melanie Savage started as a freelancer with the ReminderNews in 2007, and became a staff reporter shortly thereafter. Melanie holds an M.A. in English from UConn, and also works as a public housing administrator. Melanie enjoys getting to meet some of the more interesting and inspirational people within the communities she serves.

<https://www.courant.com/community/plainfield/hc-kp-plainfield-2020-12-24-20201214-tuxok75ryvdnjeo2mvdqzlrrug-story.html>

HORSE&HOUND

Political rivals unite to end the 'senseless, abject torture' of soring



Eleanor Jones

25 November, 2020 17:15



Credit: no credit

Political opponents have united in the US in a historic attempt to end the “senseless, abject torture” of soring for good.

Animal Wellness Action (AWA), the Animal Wellness Foundation (AWF), the Center for a Humane Economy, Horses for Life Foundation and the American Horse Protection Society, as well as key figures in the [Tennessee walking horse](#) industry have agreed to support new measures aimed at preventing the horrific practices employed by some trainers, to try to achieve the “big lick” high-stepping gait.

H&H has reported on the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, which [passed the US House last July](#) but stalled in the Senate. It was the most recent of more than 20 pieces of legislation and amendments to the 1970 Horse Protection Act, which aimed to prevent soring but left loopholes, to be introduced in the US government in the past 20 years.

“Not a single measure has been enacted, leaving a 50-year-old statute to govern management of regulated horse shows,” said a spokesman for AWA.

“The Horse Protection Amendments Act, H.R. 1157/S. 1455, introduced on seven occasions in either the House or Senate, and supported by the Tennessee walking horse industry, has also not advanced. Even attempts to finalise regulations to end soring have long-failed at every turn.”

In this current attempt, the stakeholders have come together to support compromise legislation that would ban action devices and dramatically reduce shoe sizes. It would also ban tail braces: in some horses, the muscles and tendons in the tail are severed, and the horses live in a contraption that maintains a full break in the tailbone. The horses are shown in the ring with a metal U-shaped stand under the tail to create high carriage.

“Bitter political adversaries have come together to break the logjam in Congress and put the nation on a path to end horse soring,” said Wayne Pacelle, president of AWA, and the Center for a Humane Economy. “If enacted, this deal will end the political stalemate in Congress and take the pain out of walking horse shows throughout the south.”

Frank Eichler, owner of Rising Star Ranch, the biggest Tennessee walking horse stud in the US, said the agreement between welfare organisations and the industry is “100 % about the welfare of the Tennessee walking horse, not about the horse politics”.

“Our pledge to support these reforms in statute represents the strongest commitment ever to move the industry forward and utilise science-based testing to eliminate soring. Third parties trying to thwart this common-sense agreement will only hurt the horse.”

AWA executive director Marty Irby, a former president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association, said the collaboration is the “greatest step we've seen in half a century to help end the scourge of soring, protect the horses, and allow the Tennessee walking horse to step soundly into the future”.

“Naysayers on both sides of the issue can either continue to throw rocks at those who are seeking viable reform or they can step up, join our discussion and help work together to allow the Tennessee walking horse to regain its rightful place as America’s horse,” he said.

“We invite every equine industry, veterinary, and animal protection stakeholder to the table of compromise.”

Horses for Life Foundation founder Allondra Stevens said the negotiations provide an opportunity to drive change, adding: “It’s incumbent on all of us to work together to ensure that American horses are no longer subjected to the senseless, abject torture of soring.”

Continues below...



[Tennessee walking horse owner hopes to expose horrific soring practices in feature film](#)

'I think if we can tell this story, we could create national outcry, and force the Senate into action'



Trump stops rule to save Tennessee walking horses from soring

'Bureaucratic bungling' has meant the rule change has been put on hold by the White House

The stakeholders have agreed to seek to achieve the following points:

- New and additional penalties for horse soring.
- Eliminating chains and action devices used to exacerbate pain derived from soring.
- Reducing the size of large, stacked shoes (currently 4.5-8 inches in height) to 1.5 inches at the toe and 2.5 inches in height (the same as other breeds that have shoe assemblies).
- Banning the use of tungsten, lead, or other heavy elements or composites in the shoe, and a ban on the use of metal bands to fix a heavy shoe to the hoof.

- Eliminating tail braces and tail docking (currently allowed and continuing in other breeds).
- Banning the possession of caustic chemicals and devices used in the soring process.
- Upgrading penalties for violators of the HPA.
- Creating a new organisation that will impose immediate penalties and fines on violators of the HPA while still allowing fines and penalties to be imposed through federal prosecution.
- Establishing an inspection program that parallels favors objective, science-based testing methods, as used by other breeds that conduct in-house testing.
- Employing independent inspectors licensed and certified by the US Department of Agriculture.
- Limiting the application of the legislation to Tennessee walking, racking and spotted saddle horses

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<https://www.horseandhound.co.uk/news/political-rivals-unite-to-end-the-senseless-abject-torture-of-soring-731364>

Tennessee.

'A historical effort': Advocates make new push to end Tennessee Walking Horse soring



Rachel Wegner

Nashville Tennessean

Published 9:29 p.m. CT Nov. 16, 2020



Tennessee Walking Horses stand in their stalls at the Rising Star Ranch on Sunday, Nov. 15, 2020 in Shelbyville, Tenn. *Alan Poizner/For The Tennessean*

SHELBYVILLE — On a windswept Sunday, the Rising Star Ranch in Shelbyville was quiet, removed from the hubbub of horse trainers, breeders and staff that shuffle through its 110 acres during the week.

The sun cut a dusty path through a barn near the main driveway. In the first stall, a Tennessee Walking Horse named Cerveza — one of dozens on the ranch — stood tall, the silence punctuated only by horses kicking stalls to let passers-by know they expected a treat.

Debbie Eichler moved from stall to stall chatting about each horse and their personalities. She and her husband, Frank Eichler, run the ranch, where

she's helped raise 10 to 15 horses a year for the last 15 years. The horses belong to trainers who use the facility to raise the iconic show horses known for their high-stepping gait.

Despite the serenity that day at Rising Star, the controversy surrounding Tennessee Walking Horses and the abusive, banned training practice known as soring has been anything but quiet in recent years.

RELATED: Queen Elizabeth II recognizes Tennessee horseman for efforts against soring



Debbie Eichler pets a horse at the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeding facility Rising Star Ranch she owns with her husband Frank Sunday, November 15, 2020 in Shelbyville. *Alan Poizner/For The Tennessean*

The practice causes the animals pain each time they step so they lift their front legs higher and often includes the use of caustic chemicals cooked into the skin. It can also involve shoving objects between the hoof and stacked shoes. Some trainers also intentionally cut and brace the horses' tails so they sit

higher. The horses are placed in highly-competitive shows around the United States and have been a staple in Southern traditions since the 1930s.

"The Tennessee Walking Horse has a great personality," Debbie Eichler said. "I don't know how anyone can raise them from babies and choose to hurt them."

Now the soring debate faces a new precipice: a piece of legislation that some herald as a groundbreaking compromise to further crack down on the practice.

'We had to do something different'

The Horse Protection Act of 1970 made it illegal to show sored horses in competition or transport them to shows, but that hasn't stopped trainers from finding ways to hide the abuse and continue to compete. The industry has long struggled to root out abusers, and some point to the lack of oversight and inspections at shows.

The Preventing All Soring Tactics Act — or the PAST Act — was first introduced in Congress in 2012 to close loopholes in existing laws. It has never passed. A revamped version passed the U.S. House in 2019, only to be blocked by the Senate shortly after.

This month, several animal advocacy organizations announced what they called "a historical effort" in conjunction with Tennessee Walking Horse stakeholders, signaling high hopes of finally stamping out soring once and for all.

The new legislation adapts the PAST Act but includes a ban on so-called action devices designed to make the horses step higher, along with prohibiting tail braces and reducing the size of shoes. It also includes penalties for soring, including a felony charge for chronic offenders.

Action devices include pads placed on the horses' hooves and chains on their legs to make them step higher. With soring, chemicals are applied to where the chains rub, making the horse's movement even more exaggerated.



Tennessee Walking Horses roam around at the Rising Star Ranch on Nov. 15. *Alan Poizner/For The Tennessean*

The group behind the new push includes the Animal Wellness Action; the Animal Wellness Foundation; the Center for a Humane Economy; Horses for Life Foundation; American Horse Protection Society; and key stakeholders in the Tennessee Walking Horse industry, according to a news release. Frank Eichler was among the supporters of the effort.

The new legislation does not include all of what the PAST Act originally included. Some advocates argue it does not do enough to protect Tennessee Walking Horses and worry it will codify some of the loopholes that allow abusive practices.

But Wayne Pacelle, president of Animal Wellness Action and the Center for a Humane Economy, said he sees the compromise as worthwhile.

"We had to do something different," he told The Tennessean last week. "We're not presenting a hash as an agreement. We're presenting something extremely concrete, extremely tangible that builds on the PAST Act."

Marty Irby, executive director at AWA and former president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association, said he sees it as the most significant step to protect the breed in half a century.

"Naysayers on both sides of the issue can either continue to throw rocks at those who are seeking viable reform or they can step up, join our discussion and help work together to allow the Tennessee Walking Horse to regain its rightful place as America's horse — the horse that Roy Rogers, John Wayne, Dale Evans, and President Lyndon B. Johnson prized and rode," Irby said.

"We invite every equine industry, veterinary, and animal protection stakeholder to the table of compromise."



Frank and Debbie Eichler pose for a photo at their Tennessee Walking Horse breeding facility, Rising Star Ranch, on Sunday, Nov. 15, 2020 in Shelbyville. The ranch is the largest Tennessee Walking Horse breeding operation in the United States. *Alan Poizner/For The Tennessean*

Still, the legislation could face hurdles, particularly in the U.S. Senate. U.S. Senator Marsha Blackburn, R-Tennessee, has opposed the PAST Act before, arguing the legislation threatened the entire walking horse industry in Tennessee.

Others in the industry have long argued the action devices are not forms of soring and say banning them would threaten the viability of shows. In addition, others working with the horses who oppose the PAST Act say soring remains rare and is only done by a small number of bad actors.

Blackburn, along with retiring U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tennessee, proposed a competing bill in Congress in 2019. The bill aimed to improve consistency with horse inspections at shows and provide enhanced accountability.

"In baseball if a player illegally uses steroids you punish the player — you don't shut down America's pastime," Alexander said in a 2019 statement. "We need to punish and stop any trainer, owner or rider who engages in the illegal practice of horse soring — not shut down a treasured and important tradition in both Tennessee and Kentucky."

'Let the breed thrive'

Frank Eichler, who owns Rising Star Ranch, said he's long been an advocate for the horses. His ranch is the largest Tennessee Walking Horse breeding operation in the United States. He said he's been staunchly against the practice of soring from the beginning.

"We came up with a compromise, which I think is good for everybody," he said of the new legislation. "My position is it's best for the horse. What we're trying to accomplish is basically to stop the soring and let the breed thrive."

He said he's glad the new legislation will prohibit the tools used for soring, along with holding trainers accountable through strict but fair inspections.

Looking out over a field as his wife interacted with a foal, he said the industry has long been in need of change.

"I think the horse deserves a chance to show what it can do," he said. "It has a stigma to it. You look here, and there's no stigma to this horse. It's a gentle, gentle animal."

Find reporter Rachel Wegner at rawegner@tennessean.com or on Twitter [@rachelannwegner](https://twitter.com/rachelannwegner).

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/local/2020/11/16/tennessee-walking-horse-end-soring-advocates-make-new-legislation/6276530002/>

The Rural Blog

A digest of events, trends, issues, ideas and journalism from and about rural America, by the [Institute for Rural Journalism and Community Issues](#), based at the University of Kentucky.

Saturday, September 05, 2020

As Derby and walking-horse championship coincide, horse-welfare activist sees contrast in recent news, old habits



The crowd at Churchill Downs was limited largely to connections of horses racing. (Photo: Jamie Squire, Getty Images)

OPINION by [Marty Irby](#)

Today marks quite a historical day in the world of equine competitions. For the first time, the Kentucky Derby and the Tennessee Walking Horse World Grand Championship will be held on the same evening – two well-known events, notorious for abuse. It struck me as a unique opportunity to discuss the issue of doping American racehorses in parallel to soring gaited horses, two of the equine world's most terrible practices, and the two issues I've spent the majority of the past seven years working to end.

Since 1875 The Kentucky Derby has remained the first leg of the Triple Crown of Thoroughbred horse racing until this year due to covid-19. Normally held in May, this 'Run for the Roses' where fancy hats and mint juleps typically adorn the grounds of **Churchill Downs** in Louisville, the event this year follows the Belmont Stakes amidst the controversy of rampant doping that has plagued the sport for decades. In January I [testified before the Congress](#) about the rampant doping in the sport, and in March, the **U.S. Department of Justice** [handed down 27 federal indictments](#) of trainers, veterinarians, and others involved in a massive, illegal drug ring pumping racehorses full of cocktails to cash in on millions of dollars and defraud the betting public. The rampant doping has not only defrauded the public, but it has led to the death of hundreds of race horses at U.S. tracks each year and the import of illegal drugs from China and Korea.



Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell announced a compromise regulation bill Monday at the Keeneland sales pavilion. (*Silas Walker, Lexington Herald-Leader*)

The Jockey Club, the Thoroughbred breed registry founded in 1894 with a mission 'dedicated to the improvement of Thoroughbred breeding and racing,' has been the industry's leader in working to eliminate doping and other abuses in the sport. They've taken a hard stance against the slaughter of Thoroughbred racehorses and in 2019 announced their position to curb whipping in America. **Animal Wellness Action** has joined them, **The Breeders' Cup**, **Keeneland**, the **Water Hay Oats Alliance**, **The Stronach Group**, the **Thoroughbred Owners' & Breeders' Association** and the **New York Racing Association** in the **Coalition for Horseracing Integrity** that's pushing for passage of the Horseracing Integrity Act, H.R. 1754/S. 1820 led by Reps. Paul Tonko, D-N.Y., and Andy Barr, R-Ky. and Sens. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., and Martha McSally, R-Ariz. The measure would ban the use of race day drugs, create a uniform national standard for testing and national rules, and put the **U.S. Anti-Doping Agency** in charge of enforcement and regulation that's currently overseen by a patchwork of state regulatory bodies with inconsistent rules and penalties.

While the HIA has met detractors over the past few years, we're now on a solid path to moving legislation that would end doping with [U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's announcement this week](#) that he'll be soon introducing a compromise, the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act that would also

accomplish the ban on race-day medication still with USADA in charge, but also with a more definitive set of standards and regulations that mirror the current international guidelines, and a provision requiring U.S. tracks to report data on injuries and deaths to the **Federal Trade Commission**. And McConnell's legislation brings the support of The Kentucky Derby and Churchill Downs, who had previously opposed our efforts. The Senate majority leader clearly stated in a press conference Monday at Keeneland that [The Washington Post's March editorial, "Horse racing has outlived its time"](#), which called for the end of horse racing in the U.S., raised his eyebrows and spurred him to action. Working with The Jockey Club and the Thoroughbred industry to create reform hasn't always been easy for us, but our coalition partners have always been gracious and have established credibility with every major animal protection group in the country. Leaders in the industry recognize that the welfare of the horses should be at the center of their enterprise.



Rodney Dick rode I'm Mayhem to last year's championship, then began a suspension for violating the Horse Protection Act. (Shelbyville *Times-Gazette* photo by Gary Johnson)

In contrast, the **Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration**, the breed's world-championship show established in 1939 in Shelbyville, and the **Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association**, the breed registry established in 1935 with a mission to "protect and promote the welfare of the Tennessee Walking Horse," have dealt with their issues of abuse quite differently, and have fought against change at nearly every turn. It's been no surprise that on numerous occasions the Celebration's trash cans have been lined with derogatory flyers and photos of animal advocates who've been pushing to end the painful practice of soring – the intentional infliction of pain to horses' legs and feet by applying caustic chemicals such as croton oil, mustard oil, and diesel fuel to the skin and inserting sharp objects into the hooves to produce an artificial high-step known as the "Big Lick" that has plagued the Tennessee Walking Horse breed and marred the Volunteer State for six decades.

Since 2013, when several of us spoke out in support of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 693/S. 1007, and [later testified in support of the measure](#) before the Congress, we've been [viciously attacked](#) – and have even received death threats from horse abusers in the "Big Lick" segment of the

breed. The PAST Act, now renamed in honor of Sen. Joe Tydings who authored the Horse Protection Act of 1970 designed to stamp out soring – would amend the HPA to close loopholes that have allowed soring to persist by banning the use of large stacked shoes and ankle chains on the horses' feet; eliminating the industry's corrupt self-policing scheme with inconsistent rules and regulations similar to that of horseracing and replacing the system with licensed inspectors – independent contractors of the **U.S. Department of Agriculture** trained in a uniform manner; and increase penalties for violators caught soring.

PAST, led by veterinarian U.S. Reps. Kurt Schrader, D-Oregon, and Ted Yoho, R-Fla., along with Rep. Steve Cohen, a Democrat from Memphis, passed the House last July with 333 votes in support of the bill including every single Democrat and the majority of Republicans. America's verdict from the people's House was delivered, and the "Big Lick" pain-based high-stepping gait the breed has long desired and rewarded felt a crushing blow. But PAST has lost steam in the Senate, and despite the great work of sponsors Sen. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, and Mark Warner, D-Va., garnering 51 cosponsors, the measure is stuck in Committee.

Despite the PAST Act's support in Congress, and the support of the **American Horse Council**, the **American Association of Equine Practitioners**, the **American Veterinary Medical Association**, and the **United States Equestrian Federation**, not one single group from within the breed has endorsed the bill, and they've funneled piles of cash to the campaign coffers of obstructionists like Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., to block the bill. Their ability to stymie reform is a political-science lesson in the way special interests are able to leverage their influence to delay broadly supported reforms. And unlike their counterparts in horse racing, the trainers, owners, breeders, and major entities in the walking horse breed don't seem to care that horse registrations, memberships, sales, and stallion service fees continue to decline. From my own personal experience in the walking horse industry, I've sadly seen the welfare of the horse has long been the least important point of consideration to most "Big Lick" enthusiasts and the status quo remains.

Just this week, many have witnessed horses at the Celebration that one industry insider told me appeared to be 'penitentiary walking' – a term "Big Lick" enthusiasts jokingly use to describe a horse that appears to be so sore the trainer would likely be put in the penitentiary if the inspection and justice system governing the breed actually worked.

So, this evening, while the running of the 146th Kentucky Derby takes place, please know it could very well be the last one we see run with horses on drugs, and we remain hopeful that the rampant doping and deaths will soon end. But the "Big Lick" Tennessee Walking Horse World Grand Championship – well, it remains in a downward spiral with no end in sight, and the breed itself remains the 'pariah of the equine world,' that most mainstream equine leaders would be perfectly content to see disappear and stop attracting so much negative publicity for the horse industry.



Marty Irby is the executive director of Animal Wellness Action and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association.

<http://irjci.blogspot.com/2020/09/as-kentucky-derby-and-walking-horse.html>

Tennessean.

Queen Elizabeth II recognizes Tennessee horseman for efforts against soring



Rachel Wegner

Nashville Tennessean

Published 9:29 p.m. CT Nov. 16, 2020



Marty Irby, submitted

Queen Elizabeth II this month honored a Tennessee horseman and animal advocate for his efforts to reduce violence in the training of horses.

Marty Irby, past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association and Animal Wellness Action executive director, was awarded a certificate of recognition from the British queen, a patron of Join-Up International, an equestrian non-profit organization.

Irby, a former 8-time world champion equestrian who has worked transition the Tennessee walking horse breed away from its past of soring for 15 years, is being commended for adopting Monty Roberts' concepts and initiatives, according to the formal proclamation.



U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn., accompanied by Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore., speaks during a news conference ahead of a House vote on a bill that would prevent soring in training Tennessee walking horses July 24, 2019. *Jose Luis Magana/AP*

Soring is a technique used by some trainers to improve walking horses' naturally high gait. The technique is accomplished by exposing horses to chemicals, putting foreign objects into an horse's hooves or placing heavy chains on horses.

The recognition comes as the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration is slated to begin Wednesday in Shelbyville, Tenn.

“Marty Irby is our hero and has paid a huge price in his own life in the interest of being fair to the horses. Along with thousands of supporters, Her Majesty and I strongly recommend the necessary rules and regulations to eliminate violence from this breed and all other competitions involving the horses we love,” Monty Roberts, founder of Join-Up International and former coworker of Irby, released in a statement.



Horse shoes are shown during a news conference, ahead of a House vote on a bill that would prevent Soring in training Tennessee Walking horses on Capitol Hill in Washington, Wednesday, July 24, 2019. (AP Photo/Jose Luis Magana) Jose Luis Magana, AP

According to the Animal Wellness Action, since 2013, Irby has championed the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics Act that would eliminate the use of large stacked shoes and ankle chains integral to the soring process; increase penalties for violators of the Horse Protection Act; and eliminate the breed’s self-policing system, replacing it with inspectors licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

“I am deeply honored and grateful to Her Majesty, and my friend Monty Roberts for their recognition – working to help the voiceless horses we all care so deeply about has been the greatest honor and privilege of my life,” Irby said. “I am certain that we will one day see the end of soring, doping, slaughter, and the use of whips in racing venues around the globe, and I hope that every horse lover will join me, Monty, and Queen Elizabeth, II in helping eradicate all violence and abuse from the equine world.”

Natalie Neysa Alund covers breaking news in Nashville for USA TODAY NETWORK - TENNESSEE. Reach her at nalund@tennessean.com and follow her on Twitter [@nataliealund](https://twitter.com/nataliealund).

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2020/08/26/queen-elizabeth-ii-recognizes-tennessee-horseman-marty-irby/3438557001/>



Her Majesty presents award to Alabama native horseman

By WBRC Staff

Published: Aug. 24, 2020 at 5:46 PM EDT

WINDSOR, UNITED KINGDOM, Ala. (WBRC) - A lifelong horseman, equestrian and Alabama native was honored in August by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, II for his work to reduce violence in horse training.

Marty Irby is the executive director of Animal Wellness Action. Irby, a native of Mobile, is a graduate of UMS-Wright Preparatory School and the University of South Alabama.

A former 8-time world champion equestrian and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association, Irby was awarded a certificate of recognition dated August 3, 2020, from Her Majesty via Royal Mail directly from Windsor Castle.

Irby said the Royal Family planned to recognize him in-person at Buckingham Palace, but the gathering and in-person presentation were postponed to a later date because of COVID-19.

"Marty Irby is our hero and has paid a huge price in his own life in the interest of being fair to the horses," said Monty Roberts, founder of Join-Up International. "Along with thousands of supporters, Her Majesty and I strongly recommend the necessary rules and regulations to eliminate violence from this breed and all other competitions involving the horses we love."

"I am deeply honored and grateful to Her Majesty, and my friend Monty Roberts for their recognition – working to help the voiceless horses we all care so deeply about has been the greatest honor and privilege of my life," said Marty Irby, recipient of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, II's Award. "I am certain that we will one day see the end of soring, doping, slaughter, and the use of whips in racing venues around the globe, and I hope that every horse lover will join me, Monty, and Queen Elizabeth, II in helping eradicate all violence and abuse from the equine world."

For the past fifteen years, Irby has worked to transition the Tennessee Walking horse breed away from its painful past of soring, much of that time from within the ranks of the breed, and since 2013 he has championed the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act that would eliminate the use of large stacked shoes and ankle chains integral to the soring process; increase penalties for violators of the Horse Protection Act; and eliminate the breed's self-policing system, replacing it with inspectors licensed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Soring is defined as the intentional infliction of pain to Tennessee Walking Horses' legs and feet by applying caustic chemicals such as mustard oil, croton oil, kerosene, and diesel fuel and inserting sharp objects in the horses' hooves to create an exaggerated high-stepping gait known as the "big lick."

Irby has also worked to end the practice of doping American racehorses by pushing for passage of the Horseracing Integrity Act that would ban the use of drugs on race-day; worked to advance the Safeguard American Food Exports (SAFE) Act that would permanently end horse slaughter on American soil; worked to help provide funding for the U.S. Dept. of Veterans Affairs' equine-assisted therapy program to help our

American heroes with PTSD, and worked to help save our iconic American horses and burros from the Bureau of Land Management's mass round-ups and incarceration.

Irby testified before the U.S. House of Representatives in support of both the PAST Act in 2013 and Horseracing Integrity Act in 2020 and was recognized as one of The Hill's Top Lobbyists for 2019 following the passage of the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture (PACT) Act that was signed into law by President Trump in the Oval Office with Irby present for the ceremony.

Irby has also written works on equine protection.

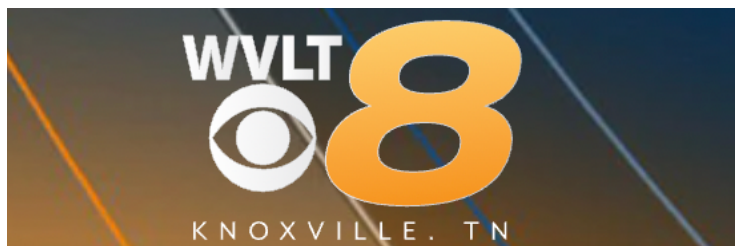


Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, II Recognizes Marty Irby (Craig Swanson Design)

[Click here to view the certificate from Queen Elizabeth, II.](#)

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<https://www.wbrc.com/2020/08/24/her-majesty-presents-award-alabama-native-horseman/>



Queen Elizabeth II recognizes Tenn. horseman, animal advocate Marty Irby

Queen Elizabeth II recognized lifelong Tennessee horseman and animal advocate Marty Irby this month 'for his extraordinary efforts to reduce violence in the training of horses by adopting Monty Roberts' concepts and initiatives.'



Joel Rouse / Ministry of Defence

Queen Elizabeth II(WHSV)

By [Lauren Meyers](#)

Published: Aug. 25, 2020 at 5:37 PM EDT

KNOXVILLE, Tenn. (WVLT) -Queen Elizabeth II recognized lifelong Tennessee horseman and animal advocate Marty Irby this month'for his extraordinary efforts to reduce violence in the training of horses by adopting Monty Roberts' concepts and initiatives.

According to the Animal Wellness Action, Irby is a former 8-time world champion equestrian and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors Association.

"Marty Irby is our hero and has paid a huge price in his own life in the interest of being fair to the horses. Along with thousands of supporters, Her Majesty and I strongly recommend the necessary rules and regulations to eliminate violence from this breed and all other competitions involving the horses we love," said Monty Roberts, founder of Join-Up International and former coworker of Irby.

Irby has worked to transition the Tennessee Walking horse breed away from its past of soring for the past 15 years, according to the Animal Wellness Action.

"I am deeply honored and grateful to Her Majesty, and my friend Monty Roberts for their recognition working to help the voiceless horses we all care so deeply about has been the greatest honor and privilege of my life," said Irby. "I am certain that we will one day see the end of soring, doping, slaughter, and the use of whips in racing venues around the globe, and I hope that every horse lover will join me, Monty and Queen Elizabeth, II in helping eradicate all violence and abuse from the equine world."

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<https://www.wvlt.tv/2020/08/25/queen-elizabeth-ii-recognizes-tenn-horseman-animal-advocate-marty-irby/>

TENNESSEE | LOOKOUT

Tennessee Walking Horse legislation advances

*Move to curtail 'soring' process comes before
Walking Horse Celebration*

BY: [ANNE BRALY](#) - JULY 29, 2020 6:00 AM



Marty Irby and Rep. Steve Cohen in 2019 at a Capitol Hill press conference on soring and the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act. Photo Credit: Animal Wellness Action

Legislation to further boost the effort to protect Tennessee Walking horses took another step forward as Amendment 38, sponsored by U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen, D-TN, won bipartisan support Friday in Congress as an amendment to the Fiscal Year 2021 Agriculture spending package.

The amendment would yield \$750,000 in funding for the USDA's Office of Inspector General to complete an audit report of the USDA's Animal Plant and Health Inspection Service's Administration of the Horse Protection Program, Enforcement of the Horse Protection Act, and the Slaughter Horse Transport Program no later than July 31st, 2021.

The last audit, completed in 2010, failed to end the practice of soring, a technique used by some trainers and owners to augment the natural "high" gait for which Tennessee Walkers are known. In order to get the "big lick,"

as the high gait is called in equine circles, horses' hooves are exposed to harsh chemicals. In addition, sharp objects have been placed in the hooves. Heavy chains and tall, stacked shoes are often attached to the feet, as well. All of this in order to get that high step judges and spectators are looking for when they attend horse shows around the Southeast, such as the Walking Horse Celebration in Shelbyville, Tenn. The amendment also provides funding over and above the \$2 million Horse Protection Program funding provided for in the base bill.

"I'm pleased that, through my amendment, the Office of the Inspector General of the USDA will now be directed to do a rigorous review of the Horse Protection Program to help to end the barbarous practice of horse soring in Tennessee walking horse competitions," said Rep. Cohen, who has fought for animal rights in Congress for many years.

Marty Irby, executive director of Animal Wellness Action, a Washington, D.C.-based animal protection organization, is past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association and was raised in the soring culture. An eight-time champion on the walking horse show circuit, Irby once sored his horses, having been taught by his horse-trainer father at the age of 13. Over time, he says, his conscience got the better of him.



Marty Irby, a former grand champion on the Tennessee Walking horse show circuit, is pictured with The Lion King following their 2006 Two-Year-Old Trail Pleasure Championship at the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association's National Futurity in Shelbyville. Lion King is a sound flat-shod horse in its natural form with no stacked shoes or ankle chains. (Photo: Marty Irby)

"I began to see soring as a terrible plague and for the cruelty it really was," he says. "Growing up, it was something we were numb to — it was part of our 'everyone-does-it' culture."

Since 2012, Irby has spoken out against soring and the wearing of stacked shoes and chains not only for Tennessee walking horses but for racking horses, another popular show breed in the South and the state horse of Alabama.

The bill passed in the House last week still needs Senate approval before final passage, and this may not happen until well into the fall of 2020. But it may

be a battle with a coalition of senators who have opposed other efforts for reform.

U.S. Senators Marsha Blackburn and Lamar Alexander offer another solution to prevent the practice of soring and the wearing of stacked shoes and chains while supporting one of the state's major industries — the sport of Tennessee Walking Horse competition. Last year, the larger horse industry supported more than 20,000 jobs nationwide and boosted the national economy by \$3.2 billion.

The House of Representatives passed a bill in 2019, the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act that would have strengthened laws against soring since it was first banned in 1970. But that's as far as it went. Alexander and Blackburn proposed a bill that would use auditors appointed by the government as well as inspectors from the walking horse industry to inspect horses. Animal welfare advocates, such as Irby, feel this is a conflict of interest — self-policing, so to speak.

Though soring for the purposes of showing and exhibiting, as well as the selling of sored horses is illegal on a federal level due to the Horse Protection Act of 1970, the use of stacked shoes and chains continues to be legal and remains a common practice because wording of the now 50-year-old bill did not include the elimination of stacked shoes and chains, Irby says.

“Many Tennessee Walking horses are still judged on how high they can step with their front legs — the big lick,” he says. “The judging system is corrupt and also a major part of what keeps soring alive.”

Irby says the only way to end soring is to end the use of stacked shoes and chains, practices that currently remain legal in the showroom.



A horse's foot wearing chains and stacked shoes is still legal and is integral to the illegal practice of soring, says Marty Irby, executive director of Animal Wellness Action. Photo credit: Bradley Dick

Efforts to reach Tennessee Walking Horse Trainer's Association president Bill Cantrell went unanswered. Cantrell is set to undergo a three-year USDA federal suspension for alleged horse soring after the 2020 Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration scheduled to be held in Shelbyville at the end of August.

Clant Seay, an attorney in Oxford, Miss., and former owner of Tennessee walkers, never practiced soring himself and says there is "no future for the big lick animal cruelty that continues to be perpetrated on the breed.

"Peaceful protests outside "big lick" horse shows by the Citizens Campaign Against "Big Lick" Animal Cruelty advocates, along with increased social media awareness, have brought public participation in "big lick" horse

shows to almost zero,” said Seay. “The Tennessee walking horse breed has no future until the ‘big lick’ is abolished once and for all.”



ANNE BRALY

Anne Braly, an award-winning food and travel writer, lives in Soddy-Daisy, Tenn. Former food editor for the Chattanooga Times Free Press, she is now pursuing a very active freelance career, including a weekly food column and frequent food stories for the Chattanooga Times Free Press, as well as WordSouth Publishing, gonomad.com and y'all.com. Her stories have also appeared in Mississippi magazine, Delta magazine, Chattanooga magazine and Orlando magazine.

<https://tennesseelookout.com/2020/07/29/tennessee-walking-horse-legislation-advances/>

Chattanooga Times Free Press

Sohn: We must help Tennessee walkers, because USDA won't

September 7, 2019 | by [Pam Sohn](#) | Copyright © 2022



Staff photo by Erin O. Smith / A Tennessee walking horse and its rider cast a shadow on the walls around the competition are of the arena during the Tennessee Walking Horse Celebration this year.

One week ago tonight, a beautiful dapple gray horse named I'm Mayhem became the World Grand Champion Tennessee Walking Horse for 2019. The horse's trainer and rider, Rodney Dick, was allowed to train and show the horse despite the fact that he's a known violator of the Horse Protection Act — the more than 40-year-old law that is supposed to, but doesn't, protect Tennessee Walking Horses from being "sored" to produce the exaggerated "big lick" gait for which they have come to be known.

Not only was it general knowledge at the Celebration that Dick is a violator, but it also was known that on Oct. 1 he is set to begin an 18-month U.S. Department of Agriculture suspension for those violations.

"Although he's been a serial violator of the Horse Protection Act (HPA) for decades, Dick was allowed to compete on the main stage," according to Marty Irby, the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association in Lewisburg, Tennessee.

"It turns out that Dick has very recent violations of injuring the feet of horses — a practice known as horse "soring" — but USDA still allowed him to compete with the punishment conveniently taking effect after he got to show his horse at the industry's main event," says Irby, noting that Dick and USDA officials signed a consent decision to that effect on Dec. 20, 2018. In an email essay, Irby calls it "a travesty" that the suspension was delayed for nearly nine months to allow Dick to appear at The Celebration and participate in the high-profile event. Dick also was fined \$2,200.

But that's not all. According to the Humane Society of the United States, Herbert Derickson, whose horse won second place, will begin a five-year federal disqualification beginning in September 2020, stemming from no less than 26 alleged violations. Gary Edwards, who rode the horse that won third place, will start serving a three-year disqualification in 2022. And it's not the first time.

We wrote about [a similar situation](#) just after the 2017 Celebration, when Shelbyville trainer Bill Callaway's trainer license was suspended for eight months just 24 hours after he and his horse, Gen's Black Maverick, became World Grand Champions. Callaway also was fined \$1,100 by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

During the suspensions, trainers are disqualified from showing, exhibiting or entering any horse, directly or indirectly through any agent, employee or otherwise in any show, exhibition, sale or auction. But once the suspension is up, and the paltry price-of-doing-business fine is paid, they are free to return to tradition.

What's wrong with this picture?

Irby and other animal advocates have a one-word answer: Politics.

"Poor enforcement and delayed sentencing seem to be the new normal at USDA. Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue and his own Office of Administrative Law Judges have agreed to dozens of consent decisions with serial violators of the Horse Protection Act. Some of the key players in the industry have been cited but their suspensions don't take effect until 2022! Justice delayed, as the old saying goes, is justice denied," Irby writes.

Neither soring nor ignoring soring began with Donald Trump, but the Trump administration signaled its tolerance for the animal cruelty right from the start in January 2017. One of its first directives was to nix a new USDA rule that banned the use of stacks and chains on horses' feet in shows.

Irby says the scale tipped when the Trump administration tapped Brian Klippenstein, the former head of Protect the Harvest — a political group focused exclusively on thwarting animal welfare reforms — to head the transition team at USDA. As soon as Klippenstein assumed his post, Irby says, the USDA dropped the new rule before it even took effect. Irby and other animal rights groups also have noticed that USDA inspections at shows have dropped off significantly.

"Informants on the grounds of the [Celebration] horse show reported that numerous horses' stacked shoes were also found with sheets of heavy lead inside them" — a new technique trainers are using to add weight and exacerbate the pain caused by chemical soring, Irby writes. "In 2019, soring abusers are brazenly flouting the law and counting on the USDA personnel to twiddle their thumbs as trainers torture horses."

There is way around this. Congress.

We already have bipartisan and widely supported legislation that promises to end — finally — the inhumane practice of horse soring. This legislation, known as [the PAST Act](#), would close the loopholes in the Horse Protection Act. PAST was originally introduced seven years ago in 2013. This year it has 345 co-sponsors across both chambers of Congress, yet its passage in the House this summer marked its first-ever vote. The bill passed the House in July by a vote of 333 to 96. Now it is being held hostage in the Senate by Mitch McConnell, whose state of Kentucky is also a "big lick" state.

Controversy, cruelty and rotten politics are not new in the Tennessee walking horse world. Yet here we are — still seeing it all nearly 50 years after the first of many walking horse scandals and early legislation to clean up the industry were supposed to return Tennessee walking horse time in the Volunteer State to its humble tradition and beauty.

Please ask your senators to cosponsor and pass the PAST bill. Tweet them with #PassthePASTAct. Call them at 202-224-3121.

<https://www.timesfreepress.com/news/opinion/times/story/2019/sep/07/sohn-walkers-usda/502998/?bcsbid=35e8d4c8-08ee-4b52-8aaa-5b1856da04ac&pbdialog=reg-wall-login-created-tfp>

Tennessean.

'They're part of the family:' Tennessee prosecutor encouraged new animal cruelty law will help state punish abusers



Mariah Timms

The Tennessean

Published 5:00 a.m. CT Nov. 29, 2019

One Nashville prosecutor hopes a new federal bill will help prosecute tricky cases of animal cruelty that may begin in Tennessee.

Assistant District Attorney Elaine Cuthbertson takes acts of animal cruelty seriously in Davidson County and said she was "encouraged" by the new legislation.

President Donald Trump signed a bill Monday increasing the federal response to acts of animal cruelty. The Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act was intended to be an upgrade to a 2010 bill that targeted videos of violence to companion animals but did not specifically outlaw the violent acts themselves.

"This common sense legislation restricts the creation and distribution of videos or images of animal torture," Trump said Monday at the bill signing. "It

is important that we combat these heinous and sadistic acts of cruelty, which are totally unacceptable in a civilized society."

Another tool for prosecution

The PACT act will not directly change Tennessee laws. Under current state law, a non-aggravated first offense of animal cruelty is a misdemeanor. Only a second offense or aggravated act of violence is a Class E felony, punishable by up to one year in jail.



President Donald Trump displays the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act after signing it during a ceremony in the Oval Office of the White House, Monday, Nov. 25, 2019. *Patrick Semansky, AP*

The new law will allow federal prosecutors to respond to animal cruelty crimes that take place across state lines, including online videos, in a way they previously did not have jurisdiction to do, Cuthbertson said.

"Some of our biggest cases are in the Tennessee Walking Horse industry. There are documented cases of abuse there that have been hard to prosecute or punish," she said.

The nature of horse shows, for example, involves traveling between states for events, which makes it difficult for local jurisdictions to prosecute allegations of abuse after the accused have left the area, she said.

Every state has laws banning animal cruelty. This year, a Maryland man was sentenced to 90 days in jail for posting a video of himself jumping on a pelican in Florida.

Kitty Block, president and CEO of the Humane Society of the United States, told USA Today the law fills a gap between state laws, allowing federal prosecutors to pursue cases that cross state line.

The bill provides for federal fines and imprisonment of up to seven years for a PACT conviction.

"PACT makes a statement about American values," Block said. "For decades, a national anti-cruelty law was a dream for animal protectionists. Today, it is a reality."

Changing to be in line with society

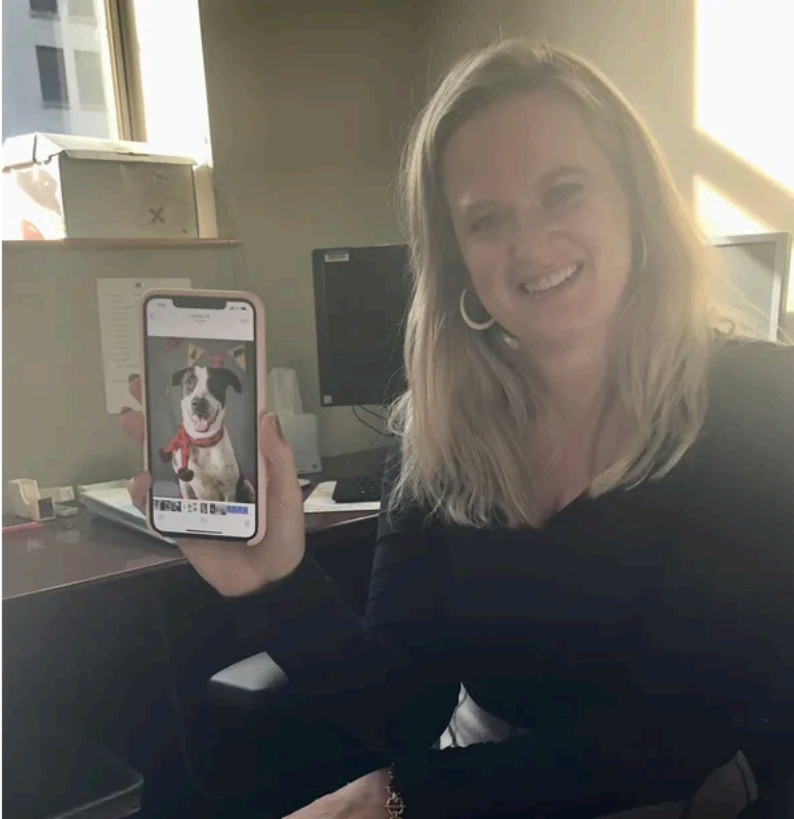
The government is playing catch-up with public opinion on animal cruelty, Cuthbertson said.

"There's really no teeth to our current laws in Tennessee," she said.

"Governments are at a disadvantage because they move slower, but the government is catching up with society.

"(Animals) aren't property, they're part of the family. They have thoughts, feelings, emotions. They're not just a shelf, and our laws need to reflect that."

She hopes the new legislation will encourage Tennessee legislators to bring state law in line with new national regulations on animal cruelty.



Assistant Davidson County District Attorney Elaine Cuthbertson shows off a photo of her dog Kimber, 18 months, taken at a charity event with Nashville Humane Association earlier this year. *Mariah Timms*

"Animal crushing" is a term used to describe torturing animals – often small ones such as kittens, puppies, bunnies or mice. The PACT act defines animal crushing as when “one or more living non-human mammals, birds, reptiles or amphibians is purposely crushed, burned, drowned, suffocated, impaled or otherwise subjected to serious bodily injury.”

The National Sheriffs' Association and Fraternal Order of Police endorsed the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture act, citing a "documented connection" between animal cruelty and other violent crimes, USA Today reported.

"This office will always and vigorously prosecute all cases to the full extent we're allowed to by law," Cuthbertson said. "Elsewhere, if jurisdictions are turning a blind eye to it, with this federal law, now there's someone else who can come in and help."

Animals need advocates

Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action, told USA Today the group was "thrilled to see the first anti-cruelty statute in American history" signed into law, lauding Trump and Congress for their efforts.

"The PACT Act will allow federal authorities to crack down on the most egregious of animal abusers and help keep American pets safe from harm," Irby said.

The bill drew bipartisan support, championed in the House by Florida Reps. Ted Deutch, a Democrat, and Vern Buchanan, a Republican. Sens. Pat Toomey, R-Pa.; Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif.; Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn.; and Dick Durbin, D-Ill., introduced the legislation in the Senate.

"Special thank you to all the animal lovers everywhere who know this is simply the right thing to do," Deutch said. "This is a major step to end animal abuse."

Cuthbertson has two dogs and four cats of her own, regularly works with Metro Animal Care and Control and other animal support organizations, including the Nashville Humane Association. She said she wants to use her voice to advocate for those who cannot speak.

"They can't tell us if they're being abused. If you think something is wrong, you should speak up. You may be their only voice," she said.

Metro Animal Care and Control is located at 5125 Harding Place. MACC Animal Control Officers responds to calls from the public and government agencies, seven days a week. If you have a service request, please call 615-862-7928.

Reach reporter Mariah Timms at mtimms@tennessean.com or 615-259-8344 and on Twitter [@MariahTimms](https://twitter.com/MariahTimms).

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/crime/2019/11/29/tennessee-animal-cruelty-laws-federal-pact-act-trump/4305793002/>



NATIONAL

Animal Wellness Action thanks Sewell for voting to protect Alabama Racking Horses

BY BRANDON MOSELEY

Published

August 29, 2019



(Office of Rep. Terri Sewell)

Wednesday, the Animal Wellness Action applauded U.S. Rep. Terri Sewell, D-Selma, for voting for legislation to protect Iconic Alabama State Racking Horses.

The U.S. House of Representatives recently passed the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, HR693, by a vote of 333 to 96. Congresswoman Sewell voted in support of the bill.

“We applaud Rep. Sewell for her terrific work to help end the practice of soring that has marred the show horse world and the Great State of Alabama for six decades,” said Animal Wellness Action executive director Marty Irby.

Irby is a native Alabamian and a former world grand champion Alabama Racking Horse.

The PAST Act strengthens the Horse Protection Act and is intended to end the torturous, painful practice of soring Alabama Racking, Tennessee Walking, and Spotted Saddle Horses. Soring, is the intentional infliction of pain to horses’ front limbs by applying caustic chemicals such as mustard oil or kerosene or inserting sharp objects into the horses’ hooves to create an exaggerated gait known as the “Big Lick.”

Soring is used to make a naturally gaited horse have an even more exaggerated gait. Horse owners win ribbons and trophies at gaited horse shows for the horses with the most desirable gait.

Soring has plagued the equine world for six decades. In April of 2019, Animal Wellness Action exposed an alleged soring incident in Alabama surrounding Joseph Abernathy. Abernathy has been under the watchful eye of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The Alabama Racking Horse was recognized as a distinct breed by the USDA in 1971. It is known for a distinctive single-foot gait. The Racking Horse Breeders' Association of America is headquartered in Decatur to maintain the breed registry. Its goal is to preserve the breed in a natural state.

The PAST Act seeks to eliminate the artificial devices currently used in Racking Horse shows such as the World Celebration held in Priceville in September to artificially enhance the gait of gaited breeds like the Alabama Racking Horse.

S. 1007 is the Senate companion bill led by Senator Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, that mirrors the House passed legislation.

"Timing is ripe, and the majority of Americans want to see Congress work to protect these iconic American horses upon whose backs our country was built upon," said Animal Wellness Advocate Priscilla Presley. "U.S. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell should swiftly schedule a vote on the PAST Act, and execute the will of the American people, and I call on him to do so!"

Neither U.S. Senators Doug Jones (D), nor Richard Shelby (R) have cosponsored S. 1007, which has 43 co-sponsors.

"The bottom line is you are either for animal cruelty, or you are against it," said Congressman Ted Yoho (R-Florida), the lead Republican sponsor of the House PAST Act.

The group chastised Congresswoman Martha Roby, R-Montgomery, for voting against the PAST Act after co-sponsoring the bill in past years. Reps. Bradley Byrne, Robert Aderholt, Mo Brooks, Mike Rogers, and Gary Palmer all also voted against the PAST Act.

Irby praised Sewell for her vote, but expressed disappointment in the rest of the House delegation from Alabama.

"I am disappointed that the rest of the Alabama delegation, including my hometown Representative, Bradley Byrne, chose to side with animal abusers and call on Senators Jones and Shelby to join in cosponsoring S. 1007 in the Senate," Irby concluded.

The PAST Act would ban the use of using large stacked shoes and ankle chains. It would also eliminate the existing system of self-regulation by the industry and impose tougher penalties for violators of the Horse Protection Act.

The PAST Act is supported by Animal Wellness Action, the American Horse Council, American Veterinary Medical Association, American Association of Equine Practitioners, United States Equestrian Federation, National Sheriff's Association, and the Alabama Veterinary Medical Association.

According to Animal Wellness Action, the PAST Act has been blocked for years by a handful of well-placed lawmakers, but a new House rule triggering consideration of any measure that attracts 290 or more cosponsors brought the issue to the floor. The PAST attracted 308 cosponsors and was led by Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Oregon and Ted Yoho (R), the cochair of the Congressional Veterinary Medicine Caucus, along with Reps. Steve Cohen, D-Tennessee, Ron Estes, R-Kansas, Jan Schakowsky, D-Illinois, and Chris Collins, R-New York. The Senate companion has garnered 43 cosponsors.

Animal Wellness Action (Action) is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) organization with a mission of helping animals by promoting legal standards forbidding cruelty. The group says that they champion causes that alleviate the suffering of companion animals, farm animals, and wildlife.



Brandon Moseley

Brandon Moseley is a former reporter at the Alabama Political Reporter.

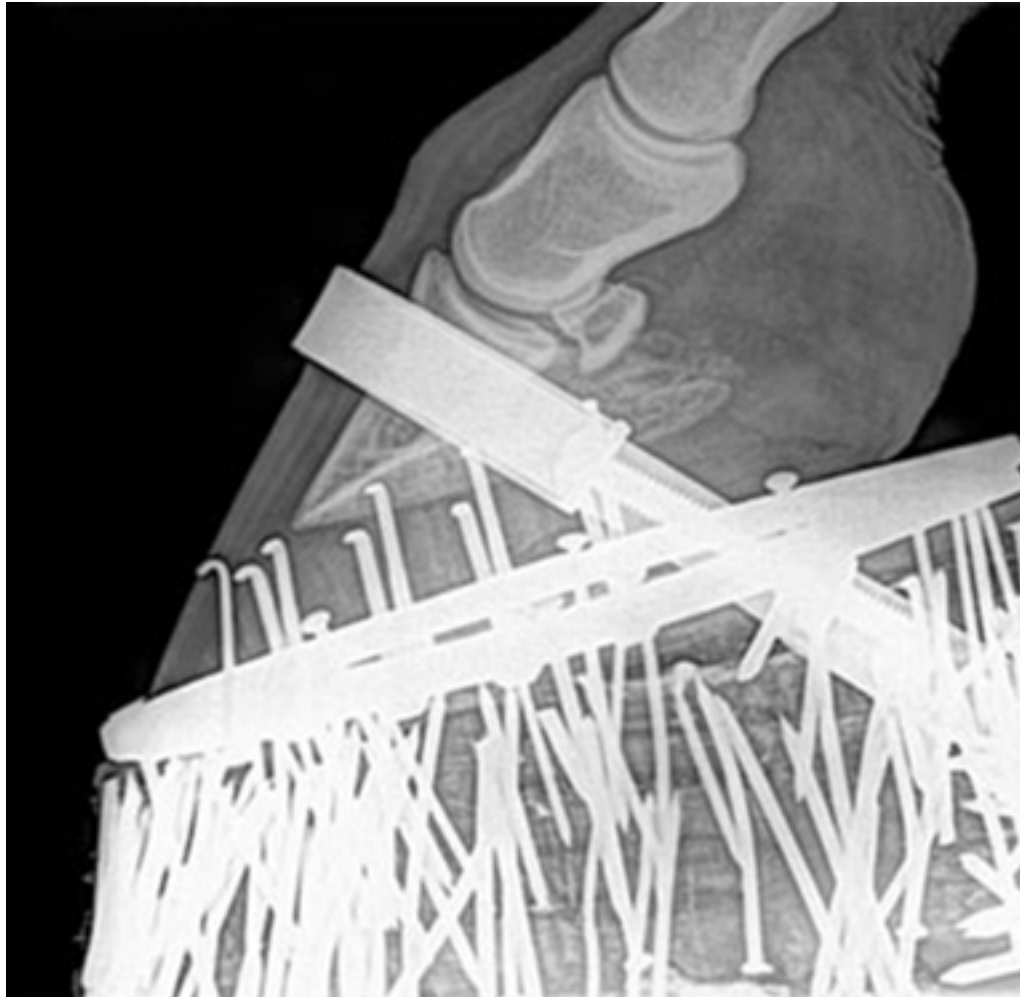
<https://www.alreporter.com/2019/08/29/animal-wellness-action-thanks-sewell-for-voting-to-protect-alabama-racking-horses/>

REVEILLE

Federal bill to ban ongoing horse abuse passes US House of Representatives

By [Gunnar Viator](#) | [@wviato1](#)

Sep 5, 2019 Updated Sep 6, 2019



The Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act aims to end painful horse soring practices.
Courtesy of Marty Irby

By a margin of 333 to 96, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a bill last week that seeks to ban the decades-old practice of horse soring.

Horse soring is the act of inflicting pain to a horse's legs, agitating them until their stride changes. The pain is severe enough to instill the unnatural prancing gaits sought after in horse competitions.

The horse soring process often involves soaking horses' feet in caustic chemicals like mustard oil or kerosene, and may be followed by dressing the wounds in chains that cause lesions. Soring treatment is not just administered once. The chemical treatment is repeated through the duration of the horses' appearances in competitions, meaning this is often a weekly occurrence.

These sorts of competitions are far from niche. LSU hosted the popular Dixie Jubilee Horse Show for decades, but discontinued it in 2004 after opinions towards horse shows and their notorious horse conditioning practices turned south.

The bill, known as the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST Act), will now proceed to the U.S. Senate. If it passes without executive veto, it will institute more effective measures to ban the practice that many criticize as cruel and unnecessary animal abuse.

Animal Wellness Action Executive Director Marty Irby clarified that horse soring has technically been illegal since 1970, but that penalties and fines are seldom enforced. Some horse soring inspectors can also have compromising ties to their industry.

"This bill would increase the penalties of soring and make it illegal to utilize big, slacked shoes around their feet," Irby said. "It would allow the U.S. Department of Agriculture to license and train soring-inspectors where there would be no conflict of interest."

Animal Wellness Action is an animal rights organization focused on promoting and enforcing policy. Last year they achieved their goal of signing into law bans on cat and dog consumption in the U.S., and animal fighting across U.S. territories.

Although the PAST Act passed through the House with a sizable majority, Irby noted that the bill was shelved for six years. He levels much of the blame for this on Senator Marsha Blackburn, who used to serve as Vice Chairwoman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and consistently voted to stall the bill.

Blackburn represents Tennessee, where the horse industry and soring practice are most prevalent. She has criticized the bill as bringing “excessive regulatory burdens on the walking horse industry.”

Irby emphasized that the PAST Act contains only the details listed above and that it is not tainted by any sort of riders that would merit controversy.

Irby stated the PAST Act has an “uphill battle” in the Senate but that he remains cautiously optimistic.

“We have 43 cosponsors in the Senate currently,” Irby said. “Public opinion is definitely turning in our favor against horse soring.”

Citing imminent “serious scandals” about soring practices, Irby predicts the Senate will soon be put under more pressure to pass the bill.

https://www.lsureveille.com/news/federal-bill-to-ban-ongoing-horse-abuse-passes-us-house/article_9c2de154-cf6d-11e9-97d5-173867bc0954.html



Georgetown Times

House licks the Big Lick: PAST Act outlaws abusive horse training method

Staff Reports

Aug 7, 2019 Updated Aug 20, 2020



For decades horses have endured torture to their front legs for the sake of a special gait. Some SC representatives voted against H.R. 693 which ended the practice.

Andres Kudacki/AP

The U.S. House of Representatives passed the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 693, by a vote of 333 to 96, last week.

The measure seeks to strengthen the Horse Protection Act and end the torturous, painful practice of soring Tennessee Walking, Racking, and Spotted Saddle Horses. Soring, the intentional infliction of pain to horses' front limbs by applying caustic chemicals such as mustard oil or kerosene or inserting sharp objects into the horses' hooves to create an exaggerated gait known as the "Big Lick," has plagued the equine world for six decades.

Ninety-five of the 96 individuals who voted against the PAST Act were Republicans. The other was an Independent. Three South Carolina representatives were among those who would have seen horse soring continue. They are Jeff Duncan, Ralph Norman and William Timmons.

Local representative Tom Rice voted in favor of the measure.

"We applaud Reps. Budd, Walker, Price, McHenry, Hudson, Butterfield, and Adams for their key role in overwhelmingly passing the PAST Act to end this barbaric and indefensible practice that has marred the horse show world for decades," said Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association. "The landslide vote in support of the bill is a powerful signal to the Senate that it should saddle up and end this cruelty to horses once and for all."

"For too long, these beautiful creatures have been severely abused and mistreated. The use of corrosive chemicals, chains, screws and nails on horses should end." - Rep. Mark Walker (R-NC-06), Vice Chairman of the U.S. House Republican Conference.

The PAST Act would ban the use of painful large stacked shoes and ankle chains and would also eliminate the existing system of self-regulation by the industry and toughen penalties for violators of the Horse Protection Act. It's supported by Animal Wellness Action, the American Horse Council, American Veterinary Medical Association, American Association of Equine Practitioners, United States Equestrian Federation, National Sheriff's Association, and Tennessee Veterinary Medical Association.

The PAST Act has been blocked for years by a handful of well-placed lawmakers, but a new House rule triggering consideration of any measure that attracts 290 or more cosponsors brought the issue to the floor. PAST attracted 308 cosponsors.

https://www.postandcourier.com/georgetown/state-news/house-licks-the-big-lick-past-act-outlaws-abusive-horse-training-method/article_cd51a53c-b960-519c-862b-2fc0e7266567.html

Great Falls Tribune

Gianforte thanked for stepping up for horses



Phil Drake

Great Falls Tribune

Published 11:49 a.m. MT Aug. 23, 2019 | Updated 3:54 p.m. MT Aug. 23, 2019

[View Comments](#)



The Animal Wellness Foundation recently thanked Montana's U.S. Rep. Greg Gianforte for supporting a House bill that bans the intentional infliction of pain to horses' front limbs to create an exaggerated gait.

House Resolution 693, the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, passed by a 333-96 vote in late July. Gianforte was also among 308 cosponsors of the bill in the 115th Congress in 2018, Animal Wellness Action officials said.

The act seeks to strengthen the Horse Protection Act and end the "painful" practice of soring Tennessee Walking, Racking, and Spotted Saddle Horses, foundation officials said.



Soring is method used by some. It is an intentional infliction of pain to horses' front limbs by applying caustic chemicals such as mustard oil or kerosene or inserting sharp objects into the horses' hooves to create an exaggerated gait known as the "Big Lick."

The act bans the use of large stacked shoes and ankle chains and would also eliminate the existing system of self-regulation by the industry and toughen penalties for violators of the Horse Protection Act.

Supporters include the American Quarter Horse Association, Animal Wellness Action, American Association of Equine Practitioners and Montana Veterinary Medical Association.

Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association, thanked Gianforte for working "to end this barbaric and indefensible practice that has marred the horse show world for decades."

U.S. Rep. Scott DesJarlais, R-Tennessee, opposed the bill and said a bill he's introduced, the Horse Protection Amendments Act, would be a better solution. He said his bill would require that all inspections be "objective and science-based," USA Today, a sister publication of the Great Falls Tribune, reported.



Rep. Greg Gianforte, R-Mont. *Franmarie Metzler U.S. House Office Of Photography*

Inspection practices would have to be the subject of testing and would have to produce "scientifically reliable, reproducible results;" be peer-reviewed; and be accepted in the veterinary and other applicable scientific communities.

Desjarlais said the PAST Act is a result of animal activist groups "spreading misinformation," USA Today reported.

The legislation must still win Senate approval, where it faces an uphill battle, USA Today reported. The bill has 40 cosponsors in the Senate. U.S. Sens.

Lamar Alexander and Marsha Blackburn have sponsored competing legislation.

Industry advocates have said the chains and other action devices do not harm horses and banning them could hurt the industry and the area's economy, USA Today reported.

Mike Inman, CEO of the Tennessee Walking Horse Celebration show, told the Associated Press walking horse shows already are heavily regulated and the law hurts the industry.

The Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association (TWHBEA) released a statement.

"The TWHBEA supports the Sens. Lamar Alexander, Marsha Blackburn, Mitch McConnell and Rand Paul bill that eliminates soring through the use of independent, objective, science-based testing and maintains the rich heritage of a breed that has been developed over a period of 200 plus years, said its executive director Maj. Rory R. Williams, U.S. Army ret.

"The TWHBEA strongly opposes the elimination of (currently) U.S. Department of Agriculture-approved equipment; that three major universities, Iowa State, Auburn and The University of Tennessee report, without qualification, does no harm," he said.

The Associated Press and USA Today contributed to this story. Reporter Phil Drake is our eye on the state capitol. For tips, suggestions or comment, he can be reached at 406-231-9021 or pdrake@greatfalltribune.com.

<https://www.greatfalltribune.com/story/news/2019/08/23/montana-rep-thanked-supporting-soring-bill/2096521001/>



U.S. Reps. Frank Pallone, Josh Gottheimer Champion Passage of Anti Horse Cruelty Legislation in a Landslide, with 333 Vote

July 31, 2019, 5:26 pm

WASHINGTON, D.C. – On Thursday, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 693, by a [vote of 333 to 96](#). U.S. Reps. Frank Pallone, Josh Gottheimer, Chris Smith, Donald Norcross, Jefferson Van Drew, Andy Kim, Tom Malinowski, Albio Sires, Bill Pascrell, Jr., Donald Payne, Jr., Mikie Sherrill, and Bonnie Watson Coleman – the entire House Delegation from New Jersey – voted in support of the measure.

The PAST Act seeks to strengthen the Horse Protection Act and end the torturous, painful practice of soring Tennessee Walking, Racking, and Spotted Saddle Horses. Soring, the intentional infliction of pain to horses' front limbs by applying caustic chemicals such as mustard oil or kerosene or inserting sharp objects into the horses' hooves to create an exaggerated gait known as the "Big Lick," has plagued the equine world for six decades.

The bill had been blocked for years by a handful of well-placed lawmakers, but a new House rule, championed by Rep. Gottheimer and the [House Problem Solvers Caucus](#) that was implemented in January, now triggers consideration of any measure that attracts 290 or more cosponsors brought the issue to the floor. The PAST Act attracted 308 cosponsors and was led by U.S. Reps. Kurt Schrader (D-OR) and Ted Yoho (R-FL), co-chairs of the Congressional Veterinary Medicine Caucus, along with Reps. Steve Cohen (D-TN), Ron Estes (R-KS), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), and Chris Collins (R-NY). The Senate companion bill is led by U.S. Sens. Mike Crapo (R-ID) and Mark Warner (D-VA) and has garnered 40 cosponsors.

"We applaud the New Jersey House delegation for voting to pass the PAST Act, and we thank Chairman Frank Pallone for his key role in the passage of this bill to end this barbaric and indefensible practice that has marred the horse show world for decades," **said Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association.** "The entire New Jersey delegation's support of the bill is a powerful signal to the Senate that it should saddle up and end this cruelty to horses once and for all."

“This bill has received endorsements from hundreds of equine and veterinary organizations, including more than 60 state and national horse groups and all 50-state medical veterinary associations,” **said U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Frank Pallone (NJ-06)**. “I thank Representative Schrader for his continued leadership and it’s time that Congress pass this legislation and put an end to soring once and for all.”

“New Jersey is home to thousands of companion, show, and sport horses. I believe we need to do all we can to protect horses from cruel practices like soring,” **said U.S. Rep. Josh Gottheimer (NJ-05)**. “That is why I was proud to co-sponsor the bipartisan PAST Act and I commend Congressman Schrader on his leadership combating this issue.”

“Horse soring is a cruel, unethical and illegal practice that has thrived because of lax enforcement for far too long,” **said U.S. Rep. Donald Norcross (NJ-01)**. “Unfortunately, certain horse trainers have taken advantage of the system, failed to self-police and are forcing horses into a lifetime of suffering. As a longtime supporter of animal rights, I know that it’s well-past time we take action and finally end this abuse.”

The PAST Act, under the jurisdiction of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, chaired by Pallone, would ban the use of painful large stacked shoes and ankle chains and would also eliminate the existing system of self-regulation by the industry and toughen penalties for violators of the Horse Protection Act. It’s supported by Animal Wellness Action, the American Horse Council, American Veterinary Medical Association, American Association of Equine Practitioners, United States Equestrian Federation, National Sheriff’s Association, and Tennessee Veterinary Medical Association.

KansasFarmer®

Entire Kansas delegation votes to end horse 'soring'



NO MORE SORING: The U.S. House has passed bipartisan legislation by a wide margin to end the practice known as 'soring' to force exaggerated gait in Tennessee walking, racking and spotted saddle horses.

The decades-old practice creates pain to force 'Big Lick' gait in some show horse breeds.

Aug 09, 2019

It is not common in today's polarized political world for legislation to pass with strong bipartisan support from the most conservative and the most liberal members of the Kansas delegation, but that is just what happened when the PAST Act sailed through the U.S. House of Representatives on a vote of 333 to 96.

PAST, an acronym for "Prevent All Sorting Tactics," addresses a decades-old practice in the show horse world of deliberately creating pain to Tennessee walking, racking and spotted saddle horses in order to create an exaggerated gait known as the "Big Lick."

The legislation garnered the support of Reps. Ron Estes, R-Kan.; Roger Marshall, R-Kan.; Steve Watkins, R-Kan.; and Sharice Davids, D-Kan. Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., is a longtime leader of the Senate companion bill that mirrors the legislation passed by the House. Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan., has not taken a position on the issue.

For the past six decades, trainers have applied caustic chemicals such as mustard oil or kerosene to horses' front limbs or inserted sharp objects into their hooves to force them into the show gait.

"As a cosponsor of the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act, I am pleased to see this bill have overwhelming bipartisan support in the U.S. House," said Estes, who represents Kansas' 4th District. "This overdue legislation will protect horses from the abusive and harmful practice of soring by improving enforcement, increasing penalties and banning incentives to continue horse soring. It's past time the PAST Act becomes law."

"We applaud Rep. Ron Estes for his leadership, and the Kansas Congressional delegation for voting to pass the PAST Act to end this barbaric and indefensible practice that has marred the horse show world for decades," said Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association. "The U.S. House's overwhelming support of the bill is a powerful signal to the Senate that it should schedule a vote and end this cruelty to horses once and for all."

"Once soring ends and the 'Big Lick' pain-based gait is eradicated, the Tennessee walking horse will thrive and grow like never before, and can be proudly exhibited around the globe," said animal wellness advocate Priscilla Presley. "I want to see the breed flourish and believe Elvis would want to see that as well. The Tennessee walking horse, in its sound and natural form, is the most versatile and greatest breed of horse on earth."

The bill had been blocked for years by a handful of well-placed lawmakers, but a new House rule now triggers consideration of any measure that attracts 290 or more cosponsors brought

the issue to the floor. The PAST Act attracted 308 cosponsors and was led by Reps. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore., and Ted Yoho, R-Fla., co-chairs of the Congressional Veterinary Medicine Caucus, along with Reps. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn.; Estes; Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill.; and Chris Collins, R-N.Y.

The Senate companion bill is led by Sens. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, and Mark Warner, D-Va., and it has garnered 40 cosponsors.

The PAST Act would ban the use of painful large stacked shoes and ankle chains, and it would also eliminate the existing system of self-regulation by the industry and toughen penalties for violators of the Horse Protection Act. It's supported by Animal Wellness Action, the American Horse Council, American Veterinary Medical Association, American Association of Equine Practitioners, United States Equestrian Federation, National Sheriff's Association, and the Kansas Veterinary Medical Association.

<https://www.farmprogress.com/livestock/entire-kansas-delegation-votes-end-horse-soring>

Tennessean.

Bill meant to prevent mistreatment of Tennessee Walking Horses passes in U.S. House

Andrew Wigdor and Matt Reynolds USA TODAY NETWORK and Medill News Service

Published 2:18 p.m. CT July 25, 2019



U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Tenn., accompanied by Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore., speaks during a news conference ahead of a House vote on a bill that would prevent soring in training Tennessee walking horses July 24, 2019. *Jose Luis Magana/AP*

In an overwhelming vote, the U.S. House on Thursday approved a bill meant to put a stop to the intentional mistreatment of Tennessee Walking Horses.

The Prevent All Soring Tactics Act, won approval on a 333 to 96 vote. Known as the PAST Act, the legislation amends the 1970 Horse Protection Act and has been pushed in some form by animal welfare advocates for years.

Soring is a technique used by some trainers to improve walking horses' naturally high gait. The technique is accomplished by exposing horses to chemicals, putting foreign objects into an horse's hooves or placing heavy chains on horses.

The Horse Protection Act bans sore horses from competing in shows, exhibitions or sales. Advocates, however, said this legislation was ignored for years, enforcement is lax and loopholes have been found by trainers.

If the bill, sponsored by U.S. Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Memphis, among others, becomes law, it would ban large stacked shoes and ankle chains used on horses, heighten penalties for violations and expand the Department of Agriculture's enforcement of the Horse Protection Act.

The new penalties would increase from \$3,000 to \$5,000 and extend prison sentences from one year to three years.

The legislation must still win Senate approval, where it faces an uphill battle. U.S. Sens. Lamar Alexander and Marsha Blackburn have sponsored competing legislation.

According to Animal Wellness Action Executive Director Marty Irby, it has taken six years to get PAST to the House floor for a vote.



“We applaud the House for overwhelmingly passing the PAST Act to end a barbaric and indefensible practices that stained the horse show world for decades,” Irby said in a statement. “Today’s landslide vote is a powerful signal to the Senate that it should saddle up and end this cruelty to horses once and for all.”

During a Wednesday news conference, Cohen and U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Oregon, a cosponsor of the bill, spoke at a podium in front of two 40-pound lead-weighted horse pads that rescuers had found on a Tennessee show horse called Gen’s Ice Glimmer.

U.S. Rep. Ted Yoho, R-Florida, another cosponsor of the act, also spoke at the conference and used the pads as an example.

Yoho said he recently had a lengthy conversation with an prominent representative of the Tennessee Walking Horse industry. Yoho said the representative told him the pads aren't proportionally any heavier than the watch the congressman wears on his wrist.

"That's probably true," Yoho said during the conference. "But there's a big difference ... I choose to wear this watch. That horse doesn't have an option, and when people do these things to the horses to win a blue ribbon, I think it's unconscionable. So you're either for animal abuse or you're against it."

Yoho also said the bill makes exceptions for stacked shoes and chains placed on horses after advice from veterinarians.

Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders’ & Exhibitors’ Association executive Steve Smith said Wednesday that he was not aware of the bill's existence.

“I’m against child abuse, I’m against murder and I’m against horse soring,” Smith said. “I don't know what legislation you're talking about.”

U.S. Rep. Scott DesJarlais, R-South Pittsburg, spoke in opposition of the bill during a House debate on Wednesday night.

He said horse inspectors were "abusing the process" and that owners were being disqualified from performing in shows.

"The only problem with the Tennessee Walking Horses today is that the current inspection methods are subjective," Desjarlais said. "PAST Act does nothing to change this. What's even more concerning is the PAST Act would increase fines and penalties, including up to three years in prison, while still utilizing subjective inspection methods."

He said a bill he's introduced, the Horse Protection Amendments Act, would be a better solution. He said his bill would require that all inspections be "objective and science-based."

Desjarlais' bill would also amend 1970's Horse Protection Act to provide increased protection to horses participating in shows, exhibitions and sales.

Under his bill, inspection methods would have to be the subject of testing and would have to produce "scientifically reliable, reproducible results;" be peer-reviewed; and be accepted in the veterinary and other applicable scientific communities.

Desjarlais said the PAST Act is a result of animal activist groups "spreading misinformation."

"The claims put forth by special interests behind this bill, that action devices are cruel or inhumane, rest on very little academic evidence," Desjarlais said. "I heard Dr. Yoho talk about it, about wrist watches. But you wear those all day and that doesn't hurt you."

DesJarlais represents Shelbyville, which is the center of the Tennessee Walking Horse industry. Each year, the city plays host to the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration.

Industry advocates have long argued that the chains and other action devices do not harm horses and banning them could hurt the industry and the area's economy.

The PAST Act garnered 308 cosponsors in the House, with the charge led by Schrader and Yoho. The companion bill in the Senate, which is not passed yet, has 40 cosponsors.

Reach Andrew Wigdor at awigdor@tennessean.com and on Twitter @andrew_wigdor

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2019/07/25/bill-prevent-mistreatment-tennessee-walking-horses-passes-in-us-house/1815790001/>



North and South Dakota House members vote against horse-soring bill

By Staff Report

Aug 19, 2019 Updated May 4, 2021



Some of the tactics used in creating the “Big Lick” gait in Tennessee Walking Horses include extra big and heavy shoes laden with sharp objects to create pain — soring — to make the horse step higher. The PAST bill would make soring illegal.

SIOUX FALLS — On July 25, the U.S. House of Representatives, passed the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, H.R. 693, by a vote of 333 to 96.

U.S. Reps. Dusty Johnson (R-SD-At Large) and Kelly Armstrong (R-ND-At Large), both freshmen members of the U.S. House of Representatives, broke with the majority of Republicans and voted against measure, siding with abusers.

The PAST Act seeks to strengthen the Horse Protection Act and end the painful practice of soring Tennessee Walking, Racking and Spotted Saddle Horses.

Soring is the intentional infliction of pain to horses’ front limbs by applying caustic chemicals such as mustard oil or kerosene or inserting sharp objects into the horses’ hooves to create an exaggerated gait known as the “Big Lick,” has plagued the equine world for six decades.

U.S. Senate Majority Whip, John Thune (R-SD) has been also a longtime supporter of the PAST Act who ushered the legislation through the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation as Ranking Member in 2014.

However, in 2019, Thune, nor U.S. Senators Mike Rounds (R-SD), John Hoeven (R-ND), or Kevin Cramer (R-ND) have cosponsored the Senate companion bill, S. 1007, led by the senior U.S. Senator from Idaho, Republican Mike Crapo, that mirrors the House passed legislation.

“We are disappointed Reps. Kelly Armstrong, and Dusty Johnson sided with abusers in voting against the PAST Act,” said Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders’ & Exhibitors’ Association. “The overall landslide support for the PAST Act in the House is a powerful signal to the U.S. Senate that it should saddle up and direct Secretary Sonny Perdue’s USDA to enforce the Horse Protection Act and end this cruelty to horses once and for all.”

“South Dakotans believe in the humane treatment of livestock, pets and horses,” said Johnson, in an emailed statement from his office. “That is a value I share and do not take lightly. However, the Past Act is simply another attempt by animal rights advocates to impose greater federal involvement at horse shows, stock shows, rodeos and even on farm welfare inspections. Tennessee Walking Horse shows are already regulated under the Federal Horse Protection Act and various state and local laws.”

“I support the humane treatment of all animals and remain committed to ending the cruel practice of soring,” said Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID), lead Republican sponsor of the PAST Act in the U.S. Senate. “I appreciate the House’s movement on the PAST Act. I will continue to work with my colleagues in the Senate to see that the legislation moves in the Senate and that current animal welfare laws are enforced.”

“Timing is ripe, and the majority of Americans want to see Congress work to protect these iconic American horses upon whose backs our country was built upon,” said Animal Wellness Advocate Priscilla Presley. “U.S. Senate Majority

Leader Mitch McConnell should swiftly schedule a vote on the PAST Act, and execute the will of the American people, and I call on him to do so!”

The PAST Act would ban the use of painful large stacked shoes and ankle chains and would also eliminate the existing system of self-regulation by the industry and toughen penalties for violators of the Horse Protection Act. It’s supported by the American Quarter Horse Association, Animal Wellness Action, the American Horse Council, American Veterinary Medical Association, American Association of Equine Practitioners, United States Equestrian Federation, National Sheriff’s Association, and both the North and South Dakota Veterinary Medical Associations.

The PAST Act has been blocked for years by a handful of well-placed lawmakers, but a new House rule triggering consideration of any measure that attracts 290 or more cosponsors brought the issue to the floor. PAST attracted 308 cosponsors, and was led by U.S. Reps. Kurt Schrader (D-OR) and Ted Yoho (R-FL), cochairs of the Congressional Veterinary Medicine Caucus, along with Reps. Steve Cohen (D-TN), Ron Estes (R-KS), Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), and Chris Collins (R-NY). The Senate companion has garnered 43 cosponsors.

https://www.capjournal.com/news/north-and-south-dakota-house-members-vote-against-horse-soring/article_c1b0397c-c29d-11e9-bce2-1fac4b22f0b1.html



Post-Examiner

“a little bit of everything”

PAST Act: Horse protection bill passes House in a landslide

[July 25, 2019](#) [Anthony C. Hayes](#)

Legislation Named For Late Senator From Maryland

WASHINGTON – Today, by a vote of 333 to 96, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act. The measure seeks to strengthen the nearly forty-year-old [Horse Protection Act](#) and end the torturous, painful practice of soring Tennessee Walking, Racking, and Spotted Saddle Horses.

Debate on the bill ([HB 693](#)) continued until almost 11 pm last night, at which time Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-OR) demanded a recorded “Yea or Nay” vote.



The late Sen. Joseph D. Tydings (D-MD) authored the 1970 Horse Protection Act.

PAST builds on a 1970 law authored by the late U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings (D-MD).

“The Horse Protection Act is a federal law that prohibits sored horses from participating in shows, exhibitions, sales or auctions. The Horse Protection Act also prohibits the transportation of sored horses to or from any of these events.” (USDA-APHIS)

“Soring involves the intentional infliction of pain to horses’ front limbs by applying caustic chemicals such as mustard oil or kerosene or inserting sharp objects into the horses’ hooves to create an exaggerated gait known as the ‘Big

Lick’,” explained Rep. Ted Yoho (R-FL.) “Soring has plagued the equine world for six decades.

“When people do these things to horses to win a blue ribbon, I think that’s unconscionable. So you’re either for animal abuse, or you’re against it. Horses have a natural gait. Some are blessed, like people, with more athletic ability. It comes down to the trainer – a good trainer that does the ethical thing to accentuate that gait naturally. I challenge the breeders out of Tennessee – you can set the breed standards of the future if you do away with this garbage.”

Though the bill mainly addresses questionable and illegal training practices in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Ohio, PAST had the nationwide support of more than 300 Representatives, including co-sponsorship by the entire Maryland delegation and the Representative from DC.

“My reason for supporting the PAST Act is simple: soring is cruel and inhumane,” said Rep. Dutch Ruppersberger (D-MD.) “I share the outrage of my constituents at those who chose to abuse animals and it’s time we finally implement laws that are already on the books banning this practice.”

Critics of the bill, such as Rep. Scott DesJarlais (R-TN) questioned the annual cost of enforcement (about \$2,000,000 per year), and alleged that USDA inspectors sometimes abuse what critics see as a “subjective process.”

DesJarlais said he also finds it concerning that the PAST Act would increase fines and penalties – including up to three years imprisonment for offenders – while still utilizing what some see as subjective inspection methods.

Critics in Congress of the PAST Act have offered as an alternative H. R.1157

Overwhelming Support for the PAST Act

“We applaud the House for overwhelmingly passing the PAST Act to end (the) barbaric and indefensible practices that stained the horse show world for decades,” said Marty Irby, executive director at [Animal Wellness Action](#) and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders’ & Exhibitors’ Association. “Today’s landslide vote is a powerful signal to the Senate that it should saddle up and end this cruelty to horses once and for all.”

[SB 1007](#) is the corresponding bill in the Senate.

“I am pleased the House passed the PAST Act with strong bipartisan support today,” said U.S. House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD). “This legislation

will close loopholes that enable the cruel practice of ‘soring’ horses. I thank Rep. Schrader for being a champion of animal welfare issues and building on the legacy of my late friend, Senator Tydings. I urge Senator McConnell to take up this bipartisan legislation without delay.”

Following the vote was Ben Tydings Smith, grandson of the late Senator Joseph D. Tydings.

“My granddad would be so thrilled the PAST Act passed the House by such an overwhelming margin,” said Tydings Smith. “He cared so deeply for these horses and I know he is probably looking down with a big smile on his face. On behalf of the Tydings family, thank you to all the sponsors, cosponsors, and Members of the House who voted to end soring and cement grandad’s legacy.”

Reaction From PAST Act Bill Sponsors

“Horse soring still runs rampant even though laws have been on the books for decades banning this cruel practice,” said Rep. Kurt Schrader (D-OR). “We gave folks a chance to self-police, but the abusive behaviors continued. The bill that was passed today will strengthen and improve current regulations by improving USDA enforcement, increasing civil and criminal penalties, and banning incentives to sore horses. This is a historic day and I am grateful for my colleagues who worked tirelessly to get this legislation across the finish line and for our equine athletes who provide us with inspiration and pleasure.”

“As a veterinarian and lover of animals, it is time we end the inhumane practice of horse soring. I want to thank House Leadership for bringing the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act up for a vote today and my colleague and fellow veterinarian Rep. Kurt Schrader for championing this bill with me over the years,” said Rep. Ted Yoho (R-FL). “The walking horse industry had plenty of time to self-police and change their ways, but they decided to press on. They have failed to take advantage of this opportunity and now it is time for horse soring to end.”

“The natural gait of the Tennessee Walking Horse is a wonder to behold and has long been revered by horse lovers,” said Rep. Steve Cohen (D-TN), an original sponsor of the PAST Act. “The practice of soring—burning, cutting, lacerating—these beautiful creatures just to exaggerate their gate and win shows is beyond reprehensible. I am so pleased that more than 300 House members are sponsoring The PAST Act. How we treat animals is a reflection of our national

character. Today, we can be proud that the House has spoken loudly on behalf of the horses and those who love horses.”

The Senate version (which has moderate partisan support) has been read twice and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.



Anthony C. Hayes

Anthony C. Hayes is an actor, author, raconteur, rapscallion and bon vivant. A one-time newsboy for the Evening Sun and professional presence at the Washington Herald, Tony’s poetry, photography, humor, and prose have also been featured in Smile, Hon, You’re in Baltimore!, Destination Maryland, Magic Octopus Magazine, Los Angeles Post-Examiner, Voice of Baltimore, SmartCEO, Alvarez Fiction, and Tales of Blood and Roses. If you notice that his work has been purloined, please let him know. As the Good Book says, “Thou shalt not steal.”

<https://baltimorepostexaminer.com/past-act-horse-protection-bill-passes-house-in-a-landslide/2019/07/25>

Veterinary Practice News

Soring bill passes in House of Representatives

The PAST Act went through in a landslide vote and will now move to the U.S. Senate for consideration

July 29, 2019



A measure to end the practice of soring horses has passed by a vote of 333 to 96 in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), a longtime advocate of the *Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act*, expressed its satisfaction in the passing of the legislation.

“AVMA has worked with Congress for many years to stop the cruel and inhumane act of horse soring,” says association president John de Jon, DVM. “We’re delighted to see lawmakers working across the aisle to advance this important legislation and provide horses with the protection from abuse they so badly need.”

AVMA says soring continues to be a pervasive issue, especially in Tennessee’s walking horse industry, where deliberate pain is inflicted to exaggerate a horse’s gait to gain advantage in horse shows.

Soring methods include the long-term application of harsh chemicals to horses’ legs, the grinding of their soles to expose sensitive tissue, the insertion of hard objects such as nails between horses’ shoes or pads and their soles, and the use of chains or other “action devices.”

Although soring was made illegal in the 1970s, AVMA reports violations often go undetected because trainers and owners are able to exploit loopholes in the law, or form relationships with inspectors who overlook them.

The bill will now move to the U.S. Senate for consideration.

“We applaud the House for overwhelmingly passing the *PAST Act* to end this barbaric and indefensible practice that has marred the horse show world for decades,” says Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action. “Today’s landslide vote is a powerful signal to the Senate that it should saddle up and end this cruelty to horses... once and for all.”

“Thank you particularly to Representatives Kurt Schrader and Ted Yoho for their efforts on this issue,” Dr. de Jon adds. “We are looking forward to working with Senate lawmakers to further support this legislation and we won’t stop until the *PAST Act* becomes law and the soring of horses gets left in the past.”

<https://www.veterinarypracticenews.com/soring-bill-passes-in-house-of-representatives/>

Tennessean.

New amendments to House bill could provide funding to curb abuse of Tennessee walking horses



Andrew Wigdor

The Tennessean

Published 5:37 p.m. CT June 19, 2019

Animal welfare advocates are praising three amendments to a U.S. House appropriations bill that would provide additional funding to enforce laws protecting animals, including Tennessee walking horses.

The bill would provide funding for the Commerce and Justice departments, as well as the federal office of science and other related agencies.

The three amendments would:

- Direct the Department of Justice to utilize \$2 million from the Legal Activities account to enforce federal criminal statutes for animal welfare, including the Horse Protection Act.
- Provide \$1 million for animal fighting law enforcement through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Inspector General to specifically crack down on dogfighting and cockfighting.
- Block funding for the issuance of permits by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for elephant or lion trophies from Tanzania, Zambia or Zimbabwe.

The federal Horse Protection Act, made effective in 1970, prohibits sored horses from participating in shows, sales, exhibitions or auctions. Soring is the mistreatment of a horse's hooves and front ankles to accentuate a horse's gait.

Tennessee walking horses have a naturally high gait, giving riders less bounce. But some trainers have used harsh chemicals or put foreign objects into a horse's hooves. Doing so forces them, because of pain, to lift their legs even higher and shift their weight to their back legs.

"USDA has done a miserable job of enforcing the Horse Protection Act over the past few years," said Marty Irby, the executive director of the Animal Wellness Action, an organization that advocates for public policies that promote animal welfare.

"Although the Department of Justice has had the ability to enforce the Horse Protection Act, they never had or had dedicated funding."

A Tennessee walking horse's gait has long been prized and showcased each year at the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration in Shelbyville.

The industry has vowed to make improvements to curb soring and points to statistics showing few violations at horse shows. But critics say more must be done and the stats show a lack of proper oversight.

Irby, a former president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association, points to the need for stronger legislation, such as the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act, a bill pending in the House that expands regulation and enforcement for soring.

"I tried for years to change things from within," he said. "I knew after that long ... that legislation was the only way to solve the problem."

Meanwhile, U.S. Sens. Lamar Alexander and Marsha Blackburn introduced the Horse Protection Amendments Act of 2019 last month. They say the legislation will put an end to horse soring and tighten accountability for trainers, although critics say it is too friendly to the industry.

"It gives all of the power over all of the Tennessee walking horse industry horse shows in the country to the agriculture commissioners from Kentucky and Tennessee and their appointees, many of which would be from the walking horse industry," Irby said.

The bill from Alexander and Blackburn would establish the Horse Industry Organization, which would be governed by a board of nine members.

Two members would be appointed by the agriculture commissioner for Tennessee, two would be appointed by the agriculture commissioner for Kentucky, two would represent the Tennessee walking horse industry, and the remaining three would be appointed by the first six members.

The act has been introduced and referred to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

"In baseball if a player illegally uses steroids you punish the player — you don't shut down America's pastime," Alexander said in a May news release. "We need to punish and stop any trainer, owner or rider who engages in the illegal practice of horse soring — not shut down a treasured and important tradition in both Tennessee and Kentucky."

He said the legislation he backs would end soring but preserve the "century-old Tennessee walking horse tradition" by improving "consistency of inspections and regulations and enhancing accountability."

Blackburn echoed those comments in announcing the legislation she is backing. She called it "common-sense reform."

Voting was expected to begin on the appropriations bill, H.R. 3055, on Wednesday. Afterward, Irby said the Animal Wellness Action will work to get the same amendments onto the Senate floor.

Reach Andrew Wigdor at awigdor@tennessean.com and on Twitter @andrew_wigdor.

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/2019/06/19/tennessee-walking-horses-amendment-house-bill-could-curb-abuse-horse-protection-act/1501554001/>

Chattanooga Times Free Press

Horse soring bill faces monumental vote; supporters fear Tennessee legislators could rein in measure

July 23, 2019 | by [Elizabeth Fite](#) | Copyright © 2022

Bipartisan legislation that promises to end the inhumane practice of horse soring — which became illegal in 1970 but persists due to loopholes in the current law — has garnered enough support to receive a vote in the U.S. House on Wednesday.

Bill supporters, however, fear continued opposition from Tennessee congressional leaders.

Soring is when humans intentionally injure horses' hooves or legs to make them step higher, creating an exaggerated gait known as the "big lick." It's mainly practiced on Tennessee walking horses and similar breeds with naturally lofty gaits in order to win judges' favor at competitions. Alabama's state horse, the racking horse, also is a common victim of soring.

Wednesday's vote on the "Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act" marks the first time Congress has moved to strengthen laws against soring since the practice was first banned. But while animal wellness advocates celebrate their big step forward, many worry the bill's 345 co-sponsors across both chambers won't be enough to overcome Senate opposition from the heart of "big lick" country.

"The Tennessee and Kentucky senators ... remain an obstacle, but we are hopeful that our cosponsor list and vote in the House will demonstrate just how widely and overwhelmingly supported the bill is, and we can use that momentum in the Senate where the bill already has 41 bipartisan supporters," reads a Tuesday email from Larkin Parker, a spokesperson for U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore.



A pad, which comes in different sizes, is attached the front hooves of a Tennessee Walking Horse which makes the horse lift it's legs higher and is considered as a method of pressure shodding. Pressure-shod ia a method of soring horse's front hooves to exaggerate the animal's gait. / Staff photo by Mark Gilliland

Schrader co-sponsors the PAST Act along with U.S. Rep. Ted Yoho, R-Fla. The two are veterinarians of more than 30 years and co-chairmen of the Congressional Veterinary Medicine Caucus. A corresponding version in the Senate is sponsored by U.S. Sens. Mike Crapo, R-Idaho, and Mark Warner, R-Virginia.

The PAST Act would increase penalties for abusers and revamp the inspection process.

Currently, walking horses competing at recognized shows are checked for evidence of soring, but those inspections are handled by numerous private entities called "horse industry organizations." Conflicts of interest have rendered these inspectors ineffective, advocates say. The largest horse show for the Tennessee walking horse breed — the Celebration in Shelbyville, Tennessee — has its own horse industry organization.

The bill also would ban the use of soring devices, including the large, stacked shoes and ankle chains.

The PAST Act was introduced in 2013 but failed to receive a vote in the House because U.S. Sen. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., consistently blocked the vote in her former role as vice chairwoman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, according to animal wellness advocate Marty Irby.

In May, U.S. Sens. Lamar Alexander and Blackburn, both Tennessee Republicans, introduced their own opposition legislation to end soring: the Horse Protections Amendments Act of 2019, which mirrors a House bill introduced by U.S. Rep. Scott DesJarlais, R-Tenn., and supported by U.S. Rep. Chuck Fleischmann, R-Tenn. They say it will better protect Tennessee walking horses and the breed's tradition.

"While we all understand the importance of protecting horses, I encourage my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to reconsider moving the PAST Act to the floor until we have had time to hold a hearing or markup of the bill. This issue is too sensitive to haphazardly rush the process," reads an emailed statement by Fleischmann.

Both bills would beef up inspections and penalties for soring, as well as eliminate the multiple horse industry organizations.

Alexander and Blackburn's bill would create one horse industry organization, governed by a board, to oversee inspections. The board would be comprised of appointees by the states of Tennessee and Kentucky, as well as industry experts.

Proponents of the PAST Act say that method is problematic, because it doesn't eliminate the problem of self-policing or address stacked shoes and chains.



Sherri Pollack, left, on the horse I'm P. Diddy, Clay Mills, on the horse Holyfield, and Justin Howell, on the horse Jose's Bummin' Around, show during the Owner-Amateur Riders on Walking Stallions, 15.2 and Under class at a Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration in Shelbyville, Tenn.

The rationale behind the opposition bill came in a news release from Alexander's and Blackburn's offices in May. It said the Tennessee Walking Horse industry supports more than 20,000 jobs nationwide and pumps \$3.2 billion into the nation's economy.

"The Tennessee Walking Horse industry plays a vital role in our state's agricultural economy," Blackburn said in that release. "It is time to address the need for common-sense reform to stop the abuse of our beloved Walking Horses and to implement inspection and testing methods to eliminate these problems for good."

Their offices also cite two studies concerning the "pad and action device" that the PAST Act seeks to ban, claiming they do not cause soring. One study was conducted over five days on 10 horses wearing stacked shoes and chains and 10 horses without. The study's authors wrote, "these findings should not be extrapolated to the long-term use of such devices in Tennessee Walking Horses performing the running walk." The second study is 40 years old. Advocates have since challenged the senators' assertions. Blackburn's spokeswoman did not return a request for comment or answer a list of questions submitted for this story. Alexander's spokeswoman referred back to the studies but did not answer questions or provide comment.

Last year, Horse Plus Humane Society rescued 622 horses from across the United States, according to Tawnee Preisner, who founded the organization in 2003. She said about 400 of those rescued horses were from Tennessee, and 60-80% of the horses at their shelter are gaited horses, mostly Tennessee walking horses.

Preisner said many of the walking horses she rescues wore stacked shoes for years on end, causing irreparable damage to their bones, joints and ligaments. "Out here in the rescue world ... we're seeing the aftermath that those short studies aren't seeing," she said. "There's far too many ex-big-lick horses that we have to put down, because they're literally falling apart."

She also said the economics cited by the senators don't add up.

"If you drive by Shelbyville, where the Celebration is, there's old big lick barns that are completely deserted, and this group or club is dying out," she said. "For them to be like 'It's just going to ruin the whole horse world in Tennessee,' it's not reality. There's plenty of horse owners out there to keep the feed stores going, farriers in business."

Clant Seay, a Mississippi attorney and outspoken big lick opponent, agrees with Preisner.

"Those numbers are not based on fact," Seay said. "They're made up, for the most part, in order to influence senators and representatives that don't have the correct information. There's no way eliminating the big lick animal cruelty will eliminate agribusiness in Tennessee, on the contrary."

Irby is the executive director and chief lobbyist of Animal Wellness Action and a former president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association. Previously, he was immersed in the Tennessee walking horse industry's soring culture.

He said in an email on the eve of Wednesday's vote that he feels a "deep sense of encouragement," despite the challenges ahead.

"This week's House vote on the PAST Act has given me renewed faith that even the millions of dollars the pro-soring coalition has poured into the campaign coffers of Marsha Blackburn, Lamar Alexander, Scott DesJarlais, and others, can't impede progress forever," he said. "The 'big lick' animal cruelty is doomed and will be eradicated for good – it's only a matter of time. Despite the personal losses, death threats, and defeats, the last seven years have been worth it."

Staff writer Mark Pace contributed to this story.

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<https://www.timesfreepress.com/news/local/story/2019/jul/23/supporters-fear-tennessee-legislators-could-s/499634/>

HORSE&HOUND

Milestone for attempts to end the 'plague' of soring Tennessee's horses



Eleanor Jones

28 May, 2019 15:10



- [Horse welfare](#)
- [Tennessee Walking Horses](#)

An amendment to US welfare law aimed at bringing the “cruelty” of soring to an end has passed a major milestone.

The Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, which would amend the 1970 Horse Protection Act to prevent the abuse of Tennessee walking and other horses, has secured enough supporters for it to move on to a debate and “floor vote”, the next stage in the legislation process.

The PAST Act was introduced in the US House in January by senators Kurt Schrader and Ted Yoho, co-chairmen of the congressional veterinary medicine caucus. The aim is to close loopholes that have allowed soring to continue.

The practice refers to measures such as applying caustic chemicals to horses’ front legs, or inserting sharp objects into their hooves, with the aim of producing the exaggerated “big lick” gait for which the Tennessee walking horses is known.

The PAST Act was first introduced six years ago but floor votes on it were blocked by influential political figures, despite “overwhelming support” from both chambers of the US government.

The sponsors of the bill named this year’s version after the late senator Joseph D Tydings, who wrote the Horse Protection Act and “worked for 48 years to close loopholes that the horse soring crowd used to complicate enforcement of the law”.

“I’ve seen horses’ feet that have been sored so badly they looked like pizza with the cheese pulled off, and it’s long past time to end the rampant abusive practice of soring that I’ve personally witnessed since childhood,” said Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action, and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders’ & Exhibitors’ Association.

“We are going to get a vote and take a big step toward eradicating the soring plague that’s marred the breed for more than 60 years, and I applaud the US house members for their dedication and support.”

Ben Tydings Smith, grandson of the late Mr Tydings, said his grandfather would be “thrilled” to see the act’s progress.

“He cared so deeply for these horses and I know he is probably looking down with a big smile on his face,” he said.

The PAST Act vote will take place no later than the week of 23 July, and supporters hope it will be a success, which would mean the Senate would have to take the matter up. If passed by the Senate, it would have to be approved by president Donald Trump before it becomes law.

For all the latest news analysis, competition reports, interviews, features and much more, don't miss Horse & Hound magazine, on sale every Thursday.

<https://www.horseandhound.co.uk/news/milestone-attempts-end-plague-soring-tennessees-horses-688464?fbclid=IwAR3REnbN6TaXhSQ8d2Esrx92py43i8hjMCWopqWbnogPIaLGMwOjkg2who>



Lawmakers reintroduce legislation to end practice of horse ‘soring’



Sen. Mike Crapo

Washington, D.C. – U.S. Senators Mike Crapo (R-Idaho) and Mark R. Warner (D-Virginia) have reintroduced bipartisan legislation to protect horses from the abusive practice known as “soring,” in which show horse trainers intentionally apply substances or devices to horses’ limbs to make each step painful and force an exaggerated high-stepping gait rewarded in show rings. Although federal law currently prohibits soring, a report by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Inspector General (IG) has found that some horse trainers often go to great lengths to continue this inhumane practice.

“I support the humane treatment of all animals and the responsible training of horses,” said Sen. Crapo. “I remain committed to ending the cruel practice of soring, and will continue to promote enforcement of current animal welfare laws.”

“Horses have been a part of our Commonwealth’s history and culture since the settling of Jamestown, and like all animals, they deserve to be treated with care and compassion,” said Sen. Warner. “The PAST Act will further protect these animals from the cruel practice of inflicting deliberate pain and suffering for show purposes.”

“I’ve seen horses’ feet that have been sored so badly they looked like pizza, and it’s long past time to end the rampant abusive practice of soring that I’ve personally witnessed since childhood,” said Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action, and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders’ & Exhibitors’ Association. “I applaud Senators Mike Crapo and Mark Warner for their continued commitment to the horses, and the PAST Act.”

“The American Horse Council – the voice of the nation’s equine sector which directly supports nearly one million U.S. jobs and contributes \$122 billion in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) – applauds the leadership of Sens. Mark Warner (D-VA) and Mike Crapo (R-ID) for introducing the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act of 2019. Although “soring” – which is the practice of inflicting pain on a horse’s limb to produce an accentuated gait – has declined since Congress enacted the Horse Protection Act in 1970, the PAST Act will build on this progress by modernizing inspection and revising penalties for violations,” said Julie M. Broadway, President of the American Horse Council.

“Horse ‘soring’ is one of the worse cruelties imaginable – where scofflaw trainers deliberately torture Tennessee walking horses to get them to fling their front legs high, just to win a cheap blue ribbon in a show ring. It’d be like forcing an Olympian to wear broken glass in her shoes so the pain will make her leap higher over the hurdles,” said Sara Amundson, President of Humane Society Legislative Fund. “We are grateful to Senators Crapo and Warner for their leadership on the PAST Act, which has garnered overwhelming bipartisan cosponsors and support by the nation’s leading horse industry, veterinary, law enforcement and animal welfare groups. We urge Senate leadership to allow a floor

vote soon to finally end this abuse.”

The Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act would:

Eliminate self-policing by requiring the USDA to assign a licensed inspector if the show's management indicates intent to hire one. Licensed or accredited veterinarians, if available, would be given preference for these positions.

Prohibit the use of action devices and pads on specific horse breeds that have a history of being the primary victims of soring. Action devices, such as chains that rub up and down an already-sore leg, intensify the horse's pain when it moves so that the horse quickly jolts up its leg.

Increase consequences on individuals caught soring a horse, including raising the penalty from a misdemeanor to a felony, which is subject to up to three years' incarceration, increasing fines from \$3,000 to \$5,000 per violation, and permanently disqualifying three-time violators from participating in horse shows, exhibitions, sales or auctions.

In 2017, the USDA Office of Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) moved to strengthen certain aspects of the Horse Protection Act by incorporating some of the major tenets of the PAST Act. However, the rule was not finalized before the end of the Obama Administration and the Trump Administration has halted the process. The PAST Act would codify these changes into law.

The PAST Act was previously introduced in 2018 by Sens. Warner and Crapo, and in 2015 by Sen. Warner and former Sen. Ayotte (R-NH). Original co-sponsors of this bill include Sens. Jerry Moran (R-KS), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Susan Collins (R-ME), Ed Markey (D-MA), Steve Daines (R-MT), Dianne Feinstein (D-CA), Pat Toomey (R-PA), Wyden (D-OR), and Bob Casey (D-PA).

Numerous groups have endorsed the bill, including the American Horse Council, American Veterinary Medical Association, American Association of Equine Practitioners, Humane Society Legislative Fund, Association of Prosecuting Attorneys, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and Virginia Veterinary Medical Association.

<https://highlandcountypress.com/Content/In-The-News/In-The-News/Article/Lawmakers-reintroduce-legislation-to-end-practice-of-horse-soring-/2/20/49848>

PAULICK REPORT

SHINING LIGHT ON THE HORSE INDUSTRY

U.S. Senators Introduce Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act To End Soring

by Edited Press Release | 04.04.2019 | 1:45pm

Today, U.S. Senators Mike Crapo (R-ID) and Mark Warner (D-VA) re-introduced the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, which would amend the Horse Protection Act (HPA) of 1970 and finally end the practice of soring Tennessee Walking, Racking, and Spotted Saddle Horses that runs rampant throughout

the Southeastern U.S. They were joined by original cosponsors that include Senator Jerry Moran (R-KS), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Susan Collins (R-ME), Diane Feinstein (D-CA), Pat Toomey (R-PA), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Steve Daines (R-MT), and Edward Markey (D-MA) .

The measure seeks to close loopholes that have allowed the barbaric practice of “soring.” Soring is conducted by trainers who apply caustic chemicals to the feet of horses or insert sharp objects into their hooves to produce an exaggerated gait. This intentional abuse of horses produces high stepping gait known as the “big lick,” and it has been an ugly feature of the equine world since the 1950's. The PAST Act was first introduced in 2013, but it has continued to be blocked at every turn by a handful of lawmakers aligned with violators of the HPA.

“I support the humane treatment of all animals and the responsible training of horses,” said U.S. Senator Mike Crapo. “I remain committed to ending the cruel practice of soring, and will continue to promote enforcement of current animal welfare laws.”

“Horses have been a part of our Commonwealth's history and culture since the settling of Jamestown, and like all animals, they deserve to be treated with care and compassion,” said U.S. Senator Mark Warner. “The PAST Act will further protect these animals from the cruel practice of inflicting deliberate pain and suffering for show purposes.”

“I've seen horses' feet that have been sored so badly they looked like pizza, and it's long past time to end the rampant abusive practice of soring that I've personally witnessed since childhood,” said Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action, and past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association. “I applaud Senators Mike Crapo and Mark Warner for their continued commitment to the horses, and the PAST Act.”

“There's no other category of horse show practitioners who do something quite so cruel and diabolical as sore the feet of horses” said Priscilla Presley, actress, producer, and animal wellness advocate. “No lawmaker should look the other way and allow this to continue for one more day.”

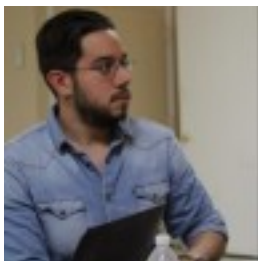
“Horse soring is a little-known but appalling abuse of horses,” said Wayne Pacelle, founder of Animal Wellness Action who has worked with lawmakers to upgrade our laws against dogfighting and cockfighting. “It should be classed in the same category of abuse as cockfighting or canned hunting – an outright abuse of animals by people who violate the norms of their industry.”

The PAST Act was also introduced in the U.S. House in January as the “U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act,” (H.R. 693) named in honor of the Horse Protection Act's author who passed last fall, by U.S Reps. Kurt Schrader (D-OR) and Ted Yoho (R-FL) and is supported by the American Horse Council, American Veterinary Medical Association, American Association of Equine Practitioners, United States Equestrian Federation, National Sheriff's Association, and the veterinary medical associations from all 50 states. It attracted 340 House and Senate cosponsors in the previous Congress and is well on its way toward attracting that level of support in the new Congress.

<https://paulickreport.com/horse-care-category/u-s-senators-introduce-prevent-all-soring-tactics-past-act-to-end-soring/>



Bipartisan Move Fights Horse Soring



DANIEL MOLINA

| JANUARY 27, 2019

Florida Congressman Ted Yoho, a veterinarian, is teaming up with another veterinarian, Democrat Congressman Kurt

Schrader from Oregon, to reintroduce a bill that would ban horse soring.

Pairing up for the “Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act,” the bill would amend the Horse Protection Act of 1970 that would end horse soring, which is when the horse’s hooves and legs are injured that elicits are more dramatic leg motion when running.

The bill was reintroduced last week, and Congressman Yoho shared his thoughts on the issue, saying that he was honored to join Congressman Schroder “and various organizations who support the end of Horse Soring. As a veterinarian and lover of animals, we must continue to keep the pressure on a select group of bad actors in the Walking Horse industry. They must comply with existing law and stop this illegal practice for good.”

Schrader added his thoughts on why the bill is necessary, commenting that “horse soring still runs rampant even though laws have been on the books for decades banning this cruel practice. We gave them a chance to self-police but the practice continued. Our bill will strengthen and improve current regulations by improving USDA enforcement, increasing civil and criminal penalties, and banning incentives to sore horses. It’s time for Congress to act and put an end to this abusive practice.”

The Horse Protection Act of 1970 was introduced by former Senator Joseph Tydings who passed away last October. In honor of him, the reintroduced bill is named after Tydings. In addition, the bill has received the support of around 280 groups and 290 lawmakers.

Marty Irby, Animal Wellness Actions' executive director, applauded the reintroduction of the bill, saying that "It's long past time to end the rampant abusive practice of soring that I've personally witnessed since childhood, and Congress should swiftly bring this measure to a vote."

<https://floridianpress.com/2019/01/bipartisan-move-fights-horse-soring/>



Ted Yoho Continues the Fight to Ban Horse Soring

By [KEVIN DERBY](#)

January 25, 2019 - 6:00am



Two veterinarians currently serving in Congress have teamed up again to bring back a bill banning horse soring.

Back in 2013, U.S. Rep. Ted Yoho, R-Fla., and U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Oreg., paired up to introduce the "Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act." Yoho's and Schrader's bill would amend the Horse Protection Act of 1970 to end horse soring which involves injuring the hooves and legs in order for the horse to have a dramatic, exaggerated leg motion which can be seen in Tennessee walking horses.

Yoho and Schrader, the current co-chairs, brought the proposal back this week, renaming it to honor former U.S. Sen. Joseph Tydings, D-Md., who passed away in October. Tydings was the sponsor of the Horse Protection Act of 1970.

"I am honored to join my fellow veterinarian, Rep. Kurt Schrader and various organizations who support the end of Horse Soring. As a veterinarian and lover of animals, we must continue to keep the pressure on a select group of bad actors in the Walking Horse industry. They must comply with existing law and stop this illegal practice for good," Yoho said on Tuesday.

"Horse soring still runs rampant even though laws have been on the books for decades banning this cruel practice," said Schrader. "We gave them a chance to self-police but the practice continued. Our bill will strengthen and improve current regulations by improving USDA enforcement, increasing civil and criminal penalties, and banning incentives to sore horses. It's time for Congress to act and put an end to this abusive practice."

The bill has proven popular in the House with around 290 cosponsors in the last Congress while more than 280 groups have backed the proposal including the American Horse Council, the American Veterinary Medical Association, the American Association of Equine Practitioners, the United States Equestrian Federation, the National Sheriffs Association and the veterinary medical associations from all 50 states.

"We applaud the members for reintroducing the PAST Act and recognizing the late Senator Joe Tydings," said Marty Irby, the executive director at Animal Wellness Action, and a past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association. "It is right and fitting to name the bill after the lawmaker who led the fight to pass the original Horse Protection Act. It's long past time to end the rampant abusive practice of soring that I've personally witnessed since childhood, and Congress should swiftly bring this measure to a vote."

The bill was sent to the U.S. House Energy and Commerce Committee on Tuesday. Over in the U.S. Senate, U.S. Sens. Mike Crapo, R-Id., and Mark Warner, D-Va., plan to introduce a companion bill.

<http://www.sunshinestatenews.com/story/ted-yoho-continues-fight-ban-horse-soring>

THE BALTIMORE SUN

POLITICS

House bill honoring late Maryland Sen. Joseph Tydings aims to curb abusive soring of horses

By Christina Tkacik

Baltimore Sun

Jan 23, 2019 at 7:05 pm



Former Maryland Senator Joseph Tydings is pictured in 2008 in his office at the law firm of Dickstein Shapiro. (Amy Davis / Baltimore Sun)

Lawmakers in Washington have introduced a bill to honor the late Maryland Senator Joseph Tydings.

The U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act would close certain loopholes that have allowed an abusive practice known as soring.

Tydings, a horse lover who died in October, spent much of his life opposing the practice, which harms horses' front limbs to create an exaggerated gait. The Democrat introduced 1970's Horse Protection Act into the Senate to combat it.

U.S. Rep. Kurt Schrader, an Oregon Democrat and a co-sponsor of the House bill, said soring still "runs rampant" despite the law. "It's time for Congress to act and put an end to this abusive practice."

Other sponsors of the bill, previously introduced in 2013, include Ted Yoho, a Florida Republican; Steve Cohen, a Tennessee Democrat; Ron Estes, a Kansas Republican; Jan Schakowsky, an Illinois Democrat; and Chris Collins, a New York Republican.

Marty Irby, executive director at Animal Wellness Action said in a statement, "It's long past time to end the rampant abusive practice of soring that I've personally witnessed since childhood, and Congress should swiftly bring this measure to a vote."

Irby, who grew up in the walking horse industry and was a champion rider, said his family disowned him when he came out against soring later in life.

"Sen. Tydings became my friend then," Irby said. "He helped me through that rough time and was just such a godsend to me."

U.S. Senators Mike Crapo, an Idaho Republican, and Mark Warner, a Virginia Democrat, plan to introduce a companion bill, according to Irby.

<https://www.baltimoresun.com/politics/bs-md-tydings-bill-20190123-story.html>



TSwift Shares Op-Ed on Blackburn's Animal Wellness Record:

Taylor Swift shared an [op-ed](#) about Republican Marsha Blackburn's record on animal wellness Wednesday in her Instagram story, adding "The more you know...". The pieces published last week in the Knoxville News Sentinel and written by Marty Irby, the executive director of the group Animal Wellness Action.

Irby told Cover/Line in an interview his op-ed "doesn't touch the tip of the iceberg" when it comes to Blackburn's record. His group ranked her among the eight worst lawmakers when it comes to animal protections.

"I am a lifelong Republican who's never voted for a Democrat in my life," he said, but after Blackburn opposed legislation that would have protected horses from soring, or inflicting pain on their front legs to give them an exaggerated, man-made gait and a high step, prized by walking horse judges, he's fought to share her record.

Irby found out about Swift sharing his op-ed through friends. "I have a lot of friends who are 25 years old," he said, adding that he's "grateful" Swift posted his piece.





Sharon Rondeau's

The Post & Email

Thursday May 18, 2018

PROPOSES “AMENDMENT 90” TO REINFORCE HORSE PROTECTION ACT

by Sharon Rondeau



(May 17, 2018) — During his time to speak during a committee meeting of the U.S. House of Representatives on Wednesday regarding a five-year proposed “Farm Bill,” Rep. Tom Marino ([R-PA10](#)) introduced an amendment with the purpose of stopping the “soring” of competitive show horses.

A vote in the full House on the bill is expected on Friday. Republicans are proposing that certain recipients of SNAP benefits, formerly known as “food stamps,” be required to work 20 hours a week or attend job training if they are physically capable.

Another point of contention is an immigration proposal within the bill aimed at reducing legal entrants to the U.S. by “at least 25%” and penalize jurisdictions, known as “sanctuary cities,” which do not adhere to federal immigration law.

The USDA's statement on any proposed 2018 legislation can be read here. The House Committee on Agriculture has issued a series of statements on the bill's progression, while others have voiced their opposition to it.

Video of Marino's comments can be viewed

here: <https://www.facebook.com/marty.irby/videos/vb.1001955835/10213956213631743/?type=2&theater>

During his remarks on "Amendment 90," which has two co-sponsors, Marino said that "core problems that have allowed the cruel practice of soring" are ongoing despite the passage of the Horse Protection Act of 1970, which prohibits the showing, transport, auction or sale of a horse which has been "sored."

"Soring" consists of the rubbing of caustic chemicals on a horse's pasterns, then the attaching of "stack" shoes and chains." Marino said that in addition to those practices, the process employs "other gruesome techniques" in order to produce the "Big Lick," a term used by activists such as the organization CCABLAC (Citizens Campaign Against Big Lick Animal Cruelty) to gain an advantage during shows.

While Marino mentioned Spotted Saddle and "racing horses" as objects of soring, Tennessee Walking Horses have been widely reported by former trainers and horse-protection activists as targets, particularly in the Southeastern United States.

Marino said that the USDA's inspector general recommended additional enforcement of the HPA, citing a rule proposing a ban on "action devices" scheduled to be published in the federal register just before the change in administrations. However, the rule was never published, and, according to CCABLAC, which attends numerous horse shows, says that the "Big Lick" gait is still coveted at certain events.

CCABLAC founder Clant Seay has reported over the last year that a number of once-public horse shows have been relocated to private property or no longer take place purportedly from increasing public awareness of the pain the horses allegedly experience from soring.

The HPA allows for USDA inspectors to examine every horse before it competes, but the budget allowed by Congress for such inspectors, known as “Designated Qualified Persons” (DQP) is insufficient.

While “National Celebration” CEO Mike Inman has said that all of the horses competing in the annual summer event in Shelbyville, TN are carefully inspected at each stage of the competition, the rider/trainer of the 2017 grand champion began serving an eight-month suspension for violations of the HPA the day after the horse he rode, Gen’s Black Maverick, received the award. Moreover, Gen’s Black Maverick was adjudicated by the USDA as having been sored in 2012 and 2016.

In the latter year, Gen’s Black Maverick was disqualified from competing in the National Celebration due to alleged soring as demonstrated by USDA documentation obtained by Seay.

Seay has reported that attendance at the National Celebration has decreased markedly in recent years, as it has at other shows where horses perform “the Big Lick.”

Update, 1:25 PM EDT: Based on a tip, The Post & Email contacted the spokesperson for the House Agriculture Committee, Rachel Millard, who informed us that Amendment 90 “was not made in order – it will not receive consideration by the House.”

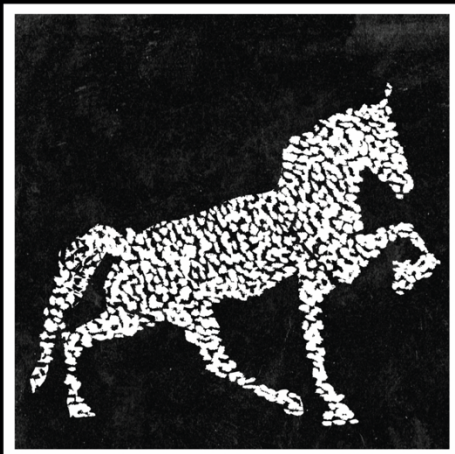
When we asked, “Does that mean that he introduced it at the wrong time?” Millard responded, “No the rules committee determines what the House will vote on and it wasn’t included in that list.”

Seay's response to the Amendment's failure to pass was, "The Amendment to Farm Bill did not make it. The opposition in DC is connected and effective. On the other hand, they have NO ANSWER to "WE, The People" – CCABLAC peacefully protesting and calling for the public to BOYCOTT the "Big Lick" Animal Cruelty.

This article is cross-posted at [Medium.com](https://medium.com) through [AF](#).

<https://www.thepostemail.com/2018/05/17/congressman-highlights-practice-of-horse-soring-during-agricultural-bill-debate/>

CRIMINAL^Q



• Julianne Alexander

THE BIG LICK



#76

10.06.17

SHARE



The Tennessee Walking Horse has a natural gait that's famously smooth. And, if trained in a certain way, it can perform a walk that's even more spectacular, called the Big Lick. But, there's a secret behind how, exactly, these horses are trained to do the crowd-pleasing step they're celebrated for; it's called "soring" and it's been outlawed since the 1970's. Still, some horse trainers still use the practice today in order to compete in the Big Lick.

When Marty Irby, president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association, spoke out against soring, he lost everything: business partners, his father, even his wife.

Mary Helen Montgomery brings us the story.

Podgist

PODCAST TRANSCRIPTS

« Criminal » Episode 76: The Big Lick

2017-10-06

The Tennessee Walking Horse has a natural gait that's famously smooth. And, if trained in a certain way, it can perform a walk that's even more spectacular, called the Big Lick. But, there's a secret behind how, exactly, these horses are trained to do the crowd-pleasing step they're celebrated for; it's called "soring" and it's been outlawed since the 1970's. Still, some horse trainers still use the practice today in order to compete in the Big Lick.


When Marty Irby, president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association, spoke out against soring, he lost everything: business partners, his father, even his wife.

Thanks to Mary Helen Montgomery for the story.


This is an unofficial transcript meant for reference. Accuracy is not guaranteed.

Edit


There once was a black stallion named carbon copy. Carbon copy was a perfect, model of the Tennessee walking horse. He new voice commands and would respond to a whistle. So people say he could take himself around the ring to show off without anyway

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on his back carbon copy was the winner of the stallion class of one thousand nine hundred and sixty four defeating forty four other top stallions. He continued to beat every other horse around and became the world champion that same year. George Lee Lenox of Memphis TN purchased carbon copy and then George Lee Lenox was found dead. They found his body slumped over in his gold cadillac. The car was full of blood. He been shot in the head two times. A man came forward and confessed that he been paid fifteen thousand dollars to kill George Lee Lenox, along with two accomplices, the shooters identified themselves as members of the so called Dixie Mafia, and it was widely speculated that the reason the Dixie Mafia wanted, George Lee Lenox Dead, was because

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George Lee Lenox had a problem with Tennessee walking horse tradition. All Fifty years later, there are still those that have trouble with the weight Tennessee walking horses are shown and in particular one practice. Everyone to today, contributor Mary Helen Montgomery tells us about an open secret. That's torn families apart and sent people into hiding judge. This is criminal. Shelbyville Tennessee is known as the walking horse capital of the world. The Tennessee walking horse is so central. The town's identity that there's a pic. One on the city seal. On my way,

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into town. I saw a stop sign that said whoa, instead of stop as in the way you tell a horse to stop when you're writing each summer, the week before Labor Day, there's a big competition just for Tennessee walking horses, it's called the Tennessee walking Horse national celebration or just the celebration they've been doing it since one thousand nine hundred and thirty nine. It's such a big event that all the schools in the county, Arkansas for the whole week, so everyone can get ready for the show I to the celebration with a woman who asked us not to use her name or to record her voice, because she's worried about her safety she's been in this world for a long time and says not, everyone gets along as well as they used to. She parked her car close to the arena under a light because she says she's been followed at horse shows before she thought my microphone would draw too much attention. So I just brought a small recorder in


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The celebration is not just a single event: it's an eleven day, experience Tennessee, King horse owners, arrived from all over the country and camp in their trailers. Alright, I met one woman who had been coming since the first celebration in one thousand, nine hundred and thirty nine her family doesn't even know much about horses. They just love to be here for a lot of kids who grew up in this part of the country. The celebration was as good as Christmas. My entire life is revolved around horses and specifically Tennessee walking horses. My family put me on the horse in the saddle, with double sided tape, saddle rubber bands around the stirrups and Luke Bryan, so that was basically stuck there. This is Marty Herby. His dad is a Tennessee walking horse trainer. So he's been going to the celebration, his whole life, it's one of my earliest memories. Probably the most vivid memory from my childhood. I would have just turned five year


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hold in nineteen. Eighty, four standing in the middle of the arena of the Tennessee walking Horse national celebration. Remember staying looking around at the stadium of thirty thousand


people or whatever the number was somewhere about like that then, and just thinking that how amazing that was in that that's what I wanted. I wanted to win that. I wanted to be that person from I guess, sort seeing that stardom aspect of it is at an early age, but the real stars of the celebration aren't the writers there, the horses All those people descend on Shelby Ville every year to see something only the Tennessee walking horse does it's called the big lick if you've never seen the big lick you've never seen a horse walk anything like this, their whole. Audie certain angle with their hind legs, squatted toward the ground and their front legs bounding forward and huge arcs their hooves

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most touching their heads. It's almost like watching a cartoon horse. Prince Marty spent his childhood helping his dad. Take care of big lick horses in the stables talking to them, loving them. His favourites were named carbon princess Mark's. Nothing honey prides ringleader. Another horse named high tones clown, so I could there. There were many of them and they were. They were your best friends yeah they were. They really were. He grew up in South Alabama and is I his childhood as a normal mom and dad happy family thing, then sort of out of the blue one day my father actually left us. You have to picture one thousand nine hundred and eighty five in South Alabama and he left our family for another man. Kids at school found out and started bullying Marty used to like have to run from school when I left, so the kids wouldn't beat me up because of and that sort of thing. So I knew I liked lived every day to go to the barn in the afternoon to sort of get away from. Every

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thing else and talk to the horses, and I guess I just sort of felt like they understood me. The barn was also the only place that Marty would get to spend I'm with his father and then one day his dad showed him how trainers got their horses to do. The big lick trainers always attached big heavy shoes to encourage the horse to lift its legs high, but there's a technique. Trainers use behind the scenes to get horses to exaggerate their gate. Even more. It's called soaring soaring is when a trainer puts caustic substances like mustard oil, kerosene or Croton oil onto the horses front, ankles and feet, they wrap them in plastic and let the chemicals bacon to the skin. The horses flesh burns until it's extremely sensitive, Then the trainer put a chain around each front ankle like a bracelet each time the chain hits the sore leg. The horse throws their leg in the air in sort of a way to get away from the pain, so would be like if you were walking over hot coals and


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sing really high or something like that or you were walking across. Think of it as walking across black hot asphalt. Barefoot you would want to bike, run really quicker, really high, and you wouldn't want to just put your foot on the ground. So that's what each of these things achieves and the more that they seem to add to it. The higher that they step Marty's dad taught him how to soar on high tones clown. Of Marty's favorite horses yeah. I remember the horse. We had white feet, which is really interesting, because white footed horses tend to show irritation much much more. They have red, skin or pink skin underneath and so use kerosene and go Joe Go Joe. Is that gritty industrial hand cleaner? Why


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a kerosene and go Joe, like you put kerosene on first and then go gel or no different things at different time? It would it's a degree of soaring, so kerosene would cause a horse to be more


sore than the Go Jo. So I guess that they have this method of they call it reminding the horse or sort of waking up so the kerosene stronger. So like the first of the week, you would put the kerosene on the horse's foot and the week progress. You would you know, sort of dial it down to put in go which is less of an irritant still in here to you'd want to dial it down, because before each show, horses are checked for signs of soaring the way athletes have to pass drug tests, sometimes inspections are performed by the USDA, sometimes by private contractors. An inspector will touch a horse's legs with Sure to see if it jerks or winces in pain, trainers have been known to teach a sword horse to pass inspection by beating it if it flinches overtime. The horse learns not to react to pain and the

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see walking horse, which is known for its docile personality, takes it. If you're caught soaring, you can be fined thousands of dollars and even go to prison. Soaring spin legal since one thousand nine hundred and seventy. When Congress passed the horse Protection ACT, the horse Protection ACT says two things that soaring is cruel and inhumane and also that it's just not fair when it comes to the big Lick sword horse has the advantage. He was always worried about the horses white feet. Going inspection of the pink skin, and so he taught me how to use desitin, which is, I don't know if this will have that it's like a diaper, rash, cream, white cream, and so after the horse have been sword and gone all this, then you would have to put the desitin on the horses feet to take away the pain in the redness and to make him be able to pass through inspection party would a guys to the horses, petting them and telling them. It was just the way it had to be. He was thirteen years old.

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Sometimes you hurt the people you love most. In my case, it just happened to be horses and that people do you think any part of it like had to do with your relationship with your father. How he was kind of gone, and then they come back, and that was something you could do to make him so yeah. I would definitely say so. You know anyone probably six their father's approval, but you know he had sort of left for awhile and read in the pictures. That was the only time that I spent with my father was actually soaring horses and riding sort horses by the time he was in his early twenties Marty was competing and he says doing really well, he had a horse named FDR. He thought was good enough to win a world championship, so we sent FDR to Tennessee or training the thing to do if you're serious about winning in Tennessee that uh


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as you soaring methods that Marty had never seen in his dad's barn. I really didn't know to what degree they really do sources that went until that experience. The trainer in Tennessee put Croton oil on FDR and oil actually used on lab animals to study pain. Other trainers would do a thing called pressure showing where they put half a golf ball or harden putty between a horse's foot in shoe to make it hurt The horse put its foot down the Croton oil worked Marty in


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are won the world championship at the celebration in two thousand and three: that's not quite a world Grand championship, the very top prize at the celebration, but it's close at this point. Marty had moved to Tennessee and fully immersed himself in the walking horse world. He didn't exclusively ride big lick horses. He also road flat, shod horses, walking horses without the big shoes and chains that hadn't been sword and at the two thousand and six celebration, Mardi won his division on a flat shot horse. Two thousand and six is actually a year that the


walking horse community doesn't like to talk about for the first time in the sixty eight years of the celebration, the final in just event was cancelled because almost every horse was disqualified. After investigators found signs of abuse. A crowd assembled in demanded that the DIS qualified horses be allowed to show the police were called. The New York Times describes an angry standoff between investigators and trainers, train

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complained, that the inspection process was subjective and quote suffocating a long standing tradition. This didn't stop the day. Click the next year was back to business. As usual Marty kept winning a lot of big titles and by twenty then he was the president of the main organization for the Tennessee walking horses. The Tennessee walking horse breeders and exhibitors Association basically grew up with the Tennessee walking horse. This is Ashley foreman. She remembers the day she met Marty when you write out horse barn and he had a padded horse in training. You know I was just standing on the side and he just comes up and starts talking, and you know it's like. Oh he's very interesting: well, not seen days later we get married in Panama City, we we have big dreams. You know we were gonna open, a barn together and

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We should we shared everything together the love for the walking more days, the passion that drives the date. Basically all revolved around Tennessee walking horse. He even bought her two horses, a big lick horse and a flat shot horse. You know when he and I got married. My mom was like you know you. Finally found with your research and for you found a guy who loves the walking horses as much as you do, and I said I know like this is perfect. Then this mine were his face. You know it said at all like it was perfect and then it is just it. It got crazy. Ashley didn't know

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But Marty had been secretly sharing information about soaring with investigators at the: U S, T A and the humane society. For years he was having a crisis of conscience. The big lick. This thing he been part of since he was a kid- was getting a lot of bad press and now they're. Proof of what some trainers are doing behind the scenes. Tennessee's beautiful horse country down this gravel roll caught on tape in this bar in undercover video is released on Nightline, showing a man hitting a horse with, but on the horses tide up, and you can hear the clanking of its restraint says it leaps up. The report goes on to show trainers in the barn, putting chemicals and Ames on horses legs. The horses on the video appear to be in such great pain. They often refuse to get up and are whipped by the stable hand in other C McConnell and the stable hands you sticks and cattle prods, and what the hue

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in society says, is Stuart E teaching the horse to stay still when inspectors test for sensitivity to pan. I actually happened to be when it came out in wending, Germany. Judging a walking horse show where all of the horses they don't allow any of this, and they don't even clip the horses whiskers in German they would never allow stacks or chains on their feet soaring or anything like that. So I sort of saw the world's reaction while being in a foreign country, and you know by cell phone was going crazy and you know I didn't even know this expose was coming out. I had no clue they didn't tell me or anything or not. Video came out with the McConnell it. It's not right that scene when you're here right how about a quick trying

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Barnes did the Ashley found the Nightline video horrible, but she says it's not at all representative of the big lick she loves horses would be gone if people still sword, because all of all of these things that we have to go through to get into a show, I mean get flaw to get checked it's a hard process. I honestly think that if it still went on that people there will be more people. Trouble than what there is. She says there are lots of ways to train for the big lick that don't involve soaring and that she would never do anything to hurt. Her horses are like my kid yeah now are. I have a little boy. He and I would play final jack. There would be with him now in their heart. I'm sorry! If Thursday downstate, you know it, it's something that you don't one year animal to go through.

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In April of two thousand and thirteen the same month, Marty and Ashley got married. A new piece of legislation was introduced in Congress, the prevent all soaring tactics, act or past act. For short, it would increase penalties in oversight and also expand the horse protection tackling not just soaring but making it illegal to exhibit a horse if any device Material had been used to quote artificially alter a horses gate in all likelihood, the past act if it got through wood in the big lick for eh and Marty decided. It was time to take a public stand and support it. The thing that I had to get to, I would have probably done all this soon now, when I was president, but I knew that the day that it happened, that my world was going to collapse. I knew my business is going under. I knew that my family, but I knew how they would react. I didn't know to the degree they would react.

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Walking horse association needed to vote, whether to support the past act. The association support would be symbolic and it would send a loud message even though so much was at stake. Marty stood up before the board and explain why he had change his mind, it was almost like the weight of the world is off my shoulders at all this years of sort of baggage and secrecy, and all these things that have to do is soaring, and I mean they're, just certain times in life when they are defining moment, and that was a defining moment in my Marty's fa. There stop speaking to him and Ashley felt betrayed by the way he had voted. It was insane. I did try for a little bit to be supportive, but at the did the day you know big licks or what I love and we were basically against each other


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no one would do business with me anymore. You know a business partners were extremely mad at me. You know, I basically said you know it's either your marriage and me or you know, support the horses like we always have for years. Somebody that I don't know in in that's why we got divorced, having little left to lose. That summer Marty agreed to do an interview with the Tennessean Nashville Daily newspaper. He talked about by soaring needed to end. The story came out on the front page above the fold now new far and wide where he stood. He started getting letters of support from all over the country, but he also started getting threats. People would call him on block numbers threatening to attack him saying things like they wanted to string him up for not keeping his mouth shut. He


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unsafe at home and went to hide out at a friend's house. She hit me out for about six weeks. I guess you'd say she lives in a place it's about like Fort Knox. She did an anti soaring advocate for like thirty years she was one of the main leaders of the anti soaring to the hideout was a


huge, solid brick house, surrounded by water on one side and a giant iron fence on the other, the woman, helping him at stock plenty of guns and ammunition, just in case they needed to defend themselves. While he was holed up. He reached out to the congressman who wrote the past ACT: Ed Whitfield, a Republican from Kentucky Whitfield ask Marty to come testify at a congressional hearing in DC and Marty agreed after he testified. He got even more death threats,

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people back in Tennessee people, he'd grown up with I at this point of lost everything. Family money had to file bankruptcy, lost my business pretty much just had. You know two nickels to rub together and we were welcomed by the congressman during that time to come, stay at his house and stayed at his home in Washington DC and during that time a job came Ben from the congressman I in his office. So he said well you're, here you don't have anything you had all these death threats as a result of testifying on step is once you just stay here. Marty took that job with Congressman Whitfield working with farmers and agricultural groups. Today, Marty works for the humane society in Washington DC. He works in a crime protection trying to stop the soaring of walking horses.

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Doping in race horses, the past tax still hasn't become a law, but Marty says he's working on it. After so many conversations about the big lick, I was so curious to see it for myself at the celebration when I called ahead to see if it would be difficult for me to get a ticket. The woman in the box office laughed at me. The arena seats, thirty thousand people, but when I went there Probably just a couple thousand people in the stands. My guide, the woman who asked to be anonymous, explain what we were looking at. I felt like we were undercover watching over our shoulders and talking and muffled voices some of their butts are kind of swaying back and forth, and some of them look. Your legs are just going in every direction. The woman I'm with says that you can tell which one's going to win. If it looks the most uncomfortable and unnatural and if it looks like it's working the hardest

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all right got it all. On your finger old stallion asking the shorter running now, She told me that the horses that'll score the highest are the ones with the most exaggerated, oversized steps. This year's winner, the World Grand champion, was a horse named geons black maverick his train. Was bill. Callaway. I was born into it Callaway to a local paper. I was born and raised in the horse business. Just after he won, some news came out document show trainer Callaway violated the federal Horse Protection ACT hours after winning the championship. Saturday, the? U a suspended Callaway for eight months and find them Callaway was actually caught soaring his horses months before the celebration, but for some reason he was a lie:

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how to compete anyway, his suspension didn't begin until after he won the championship, he will be able to compete again. Next spring Mary Helen, Montgomery Criminal is used by Lawrence for needy. Listen in me, audio mix by Johnny, Vince, Evans and Rob buyers are in, is Matilda. Urfali know, Alexander, makes original illustrations for each episode of criminal. You can see them at this is criminal dot com, we're on Facebook and twitter at criminal show criminal is recorded in the studios of North Carolina public radio. W Unc proud. Member of radiotopia from Prxa collection of the best podcasts around radio topia from Prx

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Transcript generated on 2019-10-19.

<https://thisiscriminal.com/episode-76-the-big-lick-10-5-2017/>

Science

USDA scrubbing of animal records may have been sparked by horse lawsuit

Horse owners raised concerns over privacy, due process

9 FEB 2017

BY DAVID GRIMM



A Tennessee Walking HorsePAT CANOVA/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

A lawsuit over alleged cruelty to a special breed of horse appears to have prompted the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA's) move last week to [remove thousands of reports and documents](#) relating to animal welfare from its website. The scrubbing has outraged animal welfare advocates—and made strange bedfellows of groups that oppose and support scientific research involving animals, with both sides condemning USDA's actions. It appears, however, that the agency's decision had little—if anything—to do with animal research.

[The lawsuit](#), filed in February 2016, was brought in part by Lee and Mike McGartland, Texas attorneys who enter [Tennessee Walking Horses](#) in various competitions. The breed is famous for its high-stepping gait, which some animal welfare advocates have charged comes from injuring the animals, typically by adding caustic chemicals to their legs and feet—a process known as soring. The Horse Protection Act of 1970 outlawed the practice, and the law is enforced by inspectors employed by USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS).

A negative APHIS inspection can disqualify a horse from competition, even before the owners or trainers can contest the findings in court. As a result, the McGartlands, who have had several horses disqualified from competition because of allegations of soring, charged APHIS with violating their due process rights. In particular, because the inspection reports are posted online and contain the names of the alleged violators, the McGartlands say that USDA has violated the federal Privacy Act, which regulates the

dissemination of personal information by federal agencies. The lawsuit, filed in a federal district court in Fort Worth, Texas, asks the agency to remove any such documents from its website.

It's unclear how USDA responded to the lawsuit, but reporting by *ScienceInsider* suggests that the agency conducted an internal review of whether it should continue posting violations related to the Horse Protection Act and the Animal Welfare Act (which regulates the treatment of laboratory animals). Ultimately, the agency decided to keep the records up—a decision confirmed by *The Washington Post*, which [broke the story](#) earlier today.

According to the *Post*, former agriculture secretary Tom Vilsack said his staff had recommended pulling the records because of fears of litigation, but he did not approve the action because he didn't have enough time to evaluate the consequences, and because of concerns about transparency. USDA itself vaguely alluded to these actions and the lawsuit in a [statement it put out on Tuesday](#). It reads in part:

"The review of APHIS' website has been ongoing, and the agency is striving to balance the need for transparency with rules protecting individual privacy. In 2016, well before the change of Administration, APHIS decided to make adjustments to the posting of regulatory records. In addition, APHIS is currently involved in litigation concerning, among other issues, information posted on the agency's website."

So why did USDA change its mind? Marty Irby, the Senior Director of Rural Outreach and Equine Protection for the Humane Society of the United States in Washington, D.C., and the former president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association, says the Walking Horse community has long been putting tremendous pressure on the agency to ease its enforcement of the Horse Protection Act, and to remove violations of the act from its website. "They can't win in the court of public opinion, so they have tried to influence legislators instead."

The turning point, Irby believes, came when the Trump administration hired Brian Klippenstein to lead the USDA transition team. Klippenstein is the executive director of Protect the Harvest, a Columbia, Missouri-based pro-agriculture group that has supported Right to Farm bills, which protect the agriculture industry from certain lawsuits and regulations, including those involving animal welfare. The group has also opposed restrictions on large-scale dog breeding operations—sometimes referred to as "puppy mills"—which are regulated under the Animal Welfare Act. USDA's decision to remove documents relating to violations of both the Horse Protection Act and Animal Welfare Act would be consistent with Protect the Harvest's policy goals, Irby notes. (Multiple calls and emails to Walking Horse organizations and Protect the Harvest were not returned.)

USDA's move appears to have cheered groups that represent horse owners. "For the last eight years, USDA has been releasing confidential and un-adjudicated information to animal rights extremists and activist organizations," Mindy Patterson, president of The Calvary Group, a Grover, Missouri-based company that lobbies against legislation it believes targets horse and dog owners, and farmers, writes in an email to *ScienceInsider*. "During the past eight years, USDA has been infiltrated by animal rights extremists who, with some success, attempted to change the culture within USDA-APHIS from one that is supportive of animal enterprise to one that aggressively bullies and harasses law abiding animal businesses with the ultimate goal of running them out of business."

Strange bedfellows

Meanwhile, USDA's action has had one surprising ripple effect: Groups that support the use of animals in biomedical research have become unlikely allies of their longtime adversaries in the animal rights and welfare community. When organizations including HSUS, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals, and the Animal Welfare Institute condemned the USDA scrubbing, they were joined by Speaking of Research, which defends the use of animals in scientific labs and worries that USDA's lack of transparency could make the public think that biomedical researchers who work on animals have something to hide. Removing the records from the internet also makes it hard to keep tabs on trends in animal research, according to the Foundation for Biomedical Research, which also supports the use of laboratory animals.

To combat that problem, Speaking of Research has begun uploading annual USDA reports to its [website](#), and a website called The Memory Hole 2 says it will [republish as many of the missing reports as it can](#), according to an article in *Motherboard*.

"It is not enough for the scientific community to tell the public that animal research is essential; they must also provide the public with the information showing how and why animals are necessary for medical and veterinary advances," says Tom Holder, director of Speaking of Research in London, which has staff in the United States and the United Kingdom. "Speaking of Research believes in an informed public who have as much access to the information they need to make up their mind."

****Update, 9 February, 11:21 p.m.:** This story has been updated to clarify that the Foundation for Biomedical Research did not condemn USDA's actions.*

<https://www.science.org/content/article/usda-scrubbing-animal-records-may-have-been-sparked-horse-lawsuit>



Former U.S. Senator Joseph Tydings recognized as Humane Horseman of the Year

Posted January 18th, 2017 for [Humane Society](#)

After working for nearly half a century to protect Tennessee walking horses and other American equines, former U.S. Sen. Joseph Tydings, D-Md., earned special recognition from The Humane Society of the United States as the 2016 Humane Horseman of the Year. The award is presented just days after the U.S. Department of Agriculture finalized a long-sought [rule to strengthen protections for Tennessee walking horses](#).

The HSUS selected Tydings for the award primarily because of his dedication to protecting horses from the horrific practice of soring, the intentional infliction of pain to a horse's limbs to produce an exaggerated, artificial gait known as the "big lick." When soring horses, trainers apply caustic chemicals to the skin of horses' legs and place chains around the sensitized area to exacerbate the pain. Some trainers also attach heavy, stacked shoes to the horses' hooves and often jam sharp or hard objects into the tender soles.

Marty Irby, senior director of equine protection for The HSUS, said: "Senator Tydings is a true hero, passionate horseman and dedicated public servant who has spent close to five decades working to save Tennessee walking horses and related breeds from the plague of soring. From the beginning of his time in the Senate to today, he has never backed down from the effort to end the cruelty so many horses continue to endure. We are humbled to recognize him for his unwavering commitment, and honored to know Sen. Tydings—one of the greatest horsemen of our time."

Tydings served in the last horse cavalry unit of the U.S. Army in World War II, served seven years in the Maryland House of Delegates from

Harford County, served three years as United States Attorney for the District of Maryland after being appointed by President John F. Kennedy, and also served six years in the United States Senate representing Maryland.

After learning about the vile nature of soring, Tydings introduced the Horse Protection Act to ban the practice. The legislation, co-authored and introduced with the late Sen. Howard Baker, R-Tenn., was enacted and signed into law in 1970, but due to certain weaknesses in enforcement and a later amendment, soring has continued unabated in a segment of the Tennessee walking horse industry. Tydings supported the new USDA rule to strengthen the agency's regulations under the Horse Protection Act by ending a failed industry self-policing scheme and banning the use of devices integral to soring. Tydings also continues to support the passage of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, federal legislation that would permanently codify these changes into law, increase penalties for soring and make the underlying act of soring illegal.

<https://www.pressreleasepoint.com/former-us-senator-joseph-tydings-recognized-humane-horseman-year>

Jackson Sun.

Hoyer, Dunn lend support to horse-soring bill

Paul C. Barton

Published 8:02 p.m. CT July 25, 2014 | Updated 5:37 p.m. CT July 26, 2014

[View Comments](#)



WASHINGTON – The second-ranking Democrat in the House and a former Tennessee governor are the latest to endorse legislation protecting Tennessee

walking horses from soring, the office of Rep. Ed Whitfield of Kentucky said Friday.

Steny Hoyer of Maryland, the House minority whip, became the 305th to sign on as a co-sponsor of the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act. Whitfield, a Republican, is the lead sponsor.

That means 70 percent of the House is now behind the bill, although it is stuck in House Energy and Commerce Committee, where Rep. Marsha Blackburn, R-Brentwood, is vice chairwoman. Blackburn opposes the bill.

Meanwhile, Whitfield's office said former Gov. Winfield Dunn has said he will endorse it publicly as well.

Dunn, who served from 1971 to 1975, was Tennessee's first Republican governor in more than half a century.

Widely seen as cruel, soring involves using caustic chemicals, chains, special pads and other devices on a walking horse's legs and hooves to inflict pain and create an artificially high step, referred to as the "Big Lick."

While the House bill remains trapped in committee, an identical Senate version has cleared committee but has yet to get a floor vote. It has 57 sponsors, three short of the number needed to overcome a filibuster.

Horse organizations are developing strategies to ramp up grass-roots pressure on Congress during the August recess, said Whitfield spokesman Marty Irby.

Those groups include the All American Walking Horse Alliance, World Walking Horse Association, Friends of Sound Horses and National Walking Horse Association.

"The amount of support for this legislation is astounding," Irby said.

Whitfield said earlier this week he is considering a discharge petition to force it out of Blackburn's committee and onto the House floor for a vote.

Blackburn and Republican Sen. Lamar Alexander favor alternative legislation that would require "scientific" testing to detect soring. But critics say their bills are worded in a way that would protect the status quo.

Blackburn's bill has only 12 co-sponsors, most of whom are the other Republican House members in the Tennessee delegation. Alexander's bill has only four.

Contact Paul C. Barton at pbarton@gannett.com. Follow on Twitter @PaulCBarton.

<https://www.jacksonsun.com/story/news/local/tennessee/2014/07/25/hoyer-dunn-lend-support-horse-soring-bill/13194335/>

Daily News Journal

Soring bill may move toward House vote

Paul C. Barton

Published 9:16 p.m. CT July 24, 2014

[View Comments](#)



WASHINGTON – The lead sponsor of legislation to bolster protections for Tennessee walking horses against soring will consider a discharge petition to get it out of committee and onto the House floor for a vote, his office said this week.

A discharge petition requires the signatures of 218 members, a majority of the House, to force floor action on a measure that supporters feel has been unfairly blocked in committee.

The bill in question is the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act HR, 1518, sponsored by Rep. Ed Whitfield, R-Ky., and 303 other members. The identical Senate version has 57 co-sponsors, three short of the number of votes needed to overcome a filibuster.

The Senate version has cleared committee but the House version remains trapped in the House Energy and Commerce Committee, where it is yet to receive a vote even though hearings were held in November 2013. There have been no floor votes in either chamber.

Soring is the practice of intentionally inflicting pain on horses to produce a higher-stepping gait during competitions.

Rep. Marsha Blackburn, R-Brentwood, a PAST Act opponent, is vice chairman of the powerful House panel. Blackburn has an alternative bill that she says would provide all the strengthening needed to the Horse Protection Act of 1970, the original anti-soring legislation. But critics say it would preserve a status quo in which soring often takes place.

"Congressman Whitfield is considering a discharge petition but would much rather have the legislation go regular order, and allow Rep. Marsha Blackburn to offer any amendment she may have, and debate the issue on the House floor," said Marty Irby, spokesman for the Kentucky Republican.

"This would allow the will of the people to be heard, and then a vote cast to see where the majority stands. We can't imagine why anyone would be against this and have expressed our thoughts to leadership in the U.S. House of Representatives."

Blackburn's office, when asked about Whitfield's offer, reissued the statement she released on July 3.

In it, she said, "those on the other side have refused to come together and work with us in finding a solution that would eliminate bad actors. Instead,

their only focus has been to simply eliminate the walking horse industry altogether."

PAST Act supporters face a ticking clock. Only a limited number of legislative days are left before members go home around the first of October to finish re-election campaigning. They have a month-long recess in August.

When asked if Whitfield had taken his case to House Speaker John Boehner or any other Republican leaders, Irby said: "Congressman Whitfield has had ongoing discussions with all of the leadership about moving the bill forward and will pull out all the stops to move the PAST Act to floor, at the appropriate time."

Meanwhile, Whitfield picked up a prominent supporter in the bill's 115th Republican sponsor — Rep. Don Young of Alaska.

Young has been in Congress since 1973 and is the second-ranking GOP member in terms of seniority. He is a past chairman of several major committees.

The bill is now only short three Republicans of having a majority of GOP members. A majority of the majority is an informal rule that leaders sometimes use to decide when to permit a floor vote.

In the Tennessee delegation, only Republican Sen. Bob Corker and Rep. Jim Cooper, D-Nashville, have yet to take sides.

Corker said he is waiting for "committee" review of the alternative sorting bill introduced by Sen. Lamar Alexander, also a Republican. Corker doesn't say whether he means the Commerce Committee, which has already acted, or another panel.

Clant Seay, an Oxford, Mississippi, attorney and PAST Act advocate, called for Corker to declare himself.

"We respect Sen. Corker's responsibility to the citizens of Tennessee to get this one right," Seay said.

"He is an independent thinker and not in anybody's hip pocket. The fact that he has not co-sponsored Lamar Alexander's alternative bill speaks volumes."

Cooper, while not signing on as a co-sponsor, called Tuesday for House Republican leaders to let Whitfield's bill come to a vote. "Even with a Republican leading the charge, a bill with more than 300 co-sponsors can't get a vote. House leadership should let members work their will," he said.

The only member of the Tennessee delegation co-sponsoring Whitfield's bill is Rep. Steve Cohen, D-Memphis. All seven House Republicans from the state are behind Blackburn's bill, providing the majority of its 12 co-sponsors.

Those lobbying for Whitfield's bill continued to express confidence in his stewardship.

"I'm sure he'd explore every option for getting his bill over the finish line," said Keith Dane, who handles equine issues for the Humane Society of the United States.

And Seay said: "We've depended upon Congressman Whitfield's leadership to get the bill this far. We have confidence in Congressman Whitfield's expertise in the House to get the bill to the floor for a vote."

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<https://www.dnj.com/story/news/2014/07/24/soring-bill-may-move-toward-house-vote/13140611/>

Tennessean.

TN Walking Horse happenings include board resignation, soring paper

By Heidi Hall; hhall@tennessean.com;

Published 1:01 a.m. CT Feb. 3, 2014

[View Comments](#)



America's eyes have been on the Tennessee Walking Horse industry for almost two years now, with the May 2012 undercover video release of Collierville, Tenn., trainer Jackie McConnell abusing his horses, passage of a state law to strengthen penalties for that violation and an attempt to pass a stronger federal law.

Some things to watch:

- In an email sent Jan. 17 to the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association's International Board, former exhibitor Marty Irby resigned his position as Tennessee's representative. Irby gained national news coverage last year by denouncing the industry he once represented and going to work for U.S. Rep. Ed Whitfield, R-Ky., who introduced the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act.
- The Performance Show Horse Association, which opposes the bill, released a position paper Friday on U.S. Department of Agriculture tests for soring — a term for chemically burning the front legs to induce the breed's naturally

longer, higher gait. It contends the department bans some benign substances found in shampoo and hoof polish, and over-reports soring.

- Some California members of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association sued the organization, trying to remove the international board's California director, Christy Landis. The group claims Landis opposes Whitfield's bill, and they want to vote her out.
- On Sunday, CBC, Canada's national public broadcaster, aired an episode of the show "Heartland," where the lead characters find a Tennessee Walking Horse on their ranch has been sored. Irby and a Whitfield spokesman sent out emails drawing attention to the episode.

<https://www.tennessean.com/story/news/local/2014/02/03/tn-walking-horse-happenings-include-board-resignation-soring-paper/5176873/>



FOSH SOUND HORSE CONFERENCE

2014/05/03

Friends of Sound Horses (FOSH) announced that the fourth Sound Horse Conference was a powerful and positive experience that brought together veterinarians, researchers, Tennessee Walking Horse owners, breeders and exhibitors, the USDA, and numerous individuals concerned about the ongoing sorning abuse of big lick Tennessee Walking Horses.

The Conference, held March 28-30 in Brentwood, Tennessee kicked off with a “meet and greet” reception where sound horse supporters could meet and share ideas and form relationships to develop strategies for a sound Tennessee Walking Horse future. Some of the attendees and participants at the conference included:

- USDA National Horse Protection Coordinator Dr. Rachel Cezar
- Dr. Tracy Turner, who does the USDA thermography exams at the horse shows
- Tennessean Clay Harlin whose family owns Harlinsdale Farm
- Dr. John Haffner, veterinarian at the Horse Science Faculty at MTSU
- Donna Benefield, who testified before Congress on the PAST Act
- Teresa Bippin, President of FOSH (Friends Of Sounds Horses)
- Carl Bledsoe, Reformed Big Lick Walking Horse Trainer
- Michael Blackwell, DVM
- Neal Valk, DVM
- Marty Irby, Aide to Congressman Ed Whitfield, and former President of TWHBEA
- Senator Joseph Tydings, Father of the Horse Protection Act
- Bill Harlin, 90-year-old legendary Walking Horse figure who publicly endorsed the PAST Act in *The Tennessean*
- Walking Horse Report Editor Jeffrey Howard
- TWHBEA Executive Committee member David Williams, VP Breeders
- Robert Beech, Tack proprietor, son of Walking Horse legend, the late S. W. Beech
- Dave Thomas, Publisher of Shelbyville NOW
- Gary Lane, Master Gaited Horse Clinician
- Big Lick activist Sheryl Crawford
- WHOA President, Dee Dee Miller
- Former TWHBEA President David Pruett
- Kim Bennett, Walking Horse Trainer

The Conference theme was “A Future Without Sorning,” and Master of Ceremonies, Marty Irby, former President of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders & Exhibitors Association, led the way in bringing the sound horse to the forefront. A panel discussion “Enjoying a Good Career with Gaited Horses in The Future” provided options for those wanting work within the Walking Horse industry. Attendees heard from Heritage-certified breeders, trainers, riding instructors, and clinicians specializing in gaited horses,

The optimism continued with an update on the PAST Act and a \$25,000 grant announcement from the Humane Society of the United States for individuals using, competing and promoting their Tennessee Walking Horses in non-traditional venues. Dr. John Haffner, DVM of Murfreesboro, Clay Harlin of Brentwood and Cat Dye of Winchester all spoke out for the PAST Act.

John Haffner, D.V.M., an equine veterinarian with experience with show Tennessee Walking Horses, told his life journey that brought him to the realization and public declaration: “The fact is the big lick can only be accomplished by sorning. When one sorning technique becomes detectable, another one

is developed. The big lick is a learned response to pain and if horses have not been sored, they do not learn it."

Dr. Haffner began his talk, "Soring: A Necessity for the Winning Gait," with a scripture reading from Isaiah 1: 15-20. As he read these Bible verses. He said it was "as if God was speaking directly to my heart saying it was time to get out of a business built on the suffering of horses." He spoke of his experience re-examining a mare that had been turned down by the USDA at the Columbia Spring Jubilee, where he was show veterinarian. He did the exam "with the horse show videographer recording it and could find no problem with her."

Later he was asked to testify in a court case about the matter. In a pretrial meeting with the defense attorney, he asked what he should "say if they asked me if soring was routine." But Haffner said he was never asked the question at the trial. In fact, he said, "It apparently never comes up. ...In my opinion it is the critical question... that reveals the farce that inspection is. It is all a game. The trainers pretend they don't sore the horses, the DQP's pretend that some horses haven't been sored, the USDA lets everybody pretend that there are only a few bad actors that sore, and horse show life goes on." At the end of the trial, "When the decision was rendered, the judge wrote that he ruled for the defendant based substantially on my testimony. ...that was in February. It was just in time for everybody to get ready for the show season. And did they ever get ready. I saw more open oil of mustard and blatant soring that spring than I had ever seen in my life. ...The oil was so pungent in the cross ties that it made my eyes water. The USDA had been put in their place, and I had helped do it. So we were free at last to show like we wanted. That entire spring and summer I was troubled greatly about what I had done."

By August, he believed he had received God's message to stop doing wrong. Two weeks later he had sold his part of the practice and was out. In retrospect, "The thing I could never work out was how to let some horses in and keep others out. *If they were doing the big lick, they had been sored. It was and is that simple.* Some of the horses can make it though inspection and some cannot."

Before taking questions, he concluded his remarks with a discussion of pain. "Pain is a complex sensation. Individuals respond differently to the same stimulus. ...The degree of pain resulting from a particular stimulus will vary depending on many uncontrollable factors. Pain is an immense subject of research and is difficult to elucidate, even when working with humans who can tell the investigator when and where and how bad it hurts. So to try to determine scientifically what hurts or doesn't hurt a horse with mathematical certainty is not a promising endeavor. And I submit it is not necessary or reasonable to expect the exact painfulness of any training technique to be determined by any repeatable quantitative means. But it is reasonable to assume that oil of mustard on the skin or excess pressure on the sole hurts."

His answer to a question about horses' memory of pain: "The suggestion that a horse that has been trained to do the big lick can be turned out over the winter and put back on pads in the spring and do the big lick without soring fails to take into account an important fact. That fact is that this is only possible with horses that at one point in their training were sored. They learned the gait because of the pain induced by the chain hitting on the pastern or the pressure shoe pressing on the sole. Those horses remember the pain and they will do the big lick without a recent episode of soring. It is safe to say that a horse that has never been sored will not do the big lick if someone puts a built up shoe and a chain on him and starts riding. He will walk in an odd manner with an exaggerated gait, but he will not immediately start stroking. And he certainly would not win a class at the Celebration."

The panel discussion of "Current Soring Tactics" openly discussed the current abuses and methods used to achieve the winning "big lick" and flat-shod performance gaits. The panel provided information from veterinarians about technology and science currently used to identify soring and scar rule violations, as well as detection of caustic agents and foreign prohibited substances. A

practicing veterinarian discussed his professional experience in Tennessee and the difficulty of detecting some soring methods, and another DVM discussed the actual pain felt by the horses from the act of “soring” used for achieving the big lick. He explained that it’s not just “sore” like a sore muscle, but acute pain like a throbbing tooth ache and that the horse is forced to endure and walk on that throbbing pain with both front feet.

Attendees were mesmerized by luncheon speaker Pastor Clay Harlin’s story of being ostracized by the Tennessee Walking Horse industry after a newspaper published his factual account of widespread soring abuse, and his career change where he successfully re-crafted his professional life. The mood then lightened as others recounted how they are seeking opportunities to promote the Tennessee Walking Horse in competitions, including dressage, endurance/competitive trail and versatility, as well as horse shows. Panelists described shows and rail classes that are growing in size and popularity, the rapidly-growing specialty of gaited dressage, and how gaited horses are now a significant winning force in distance and endurance riding. Attendees also heard more about Tennessee Walking Horses’ natural skills and abilities in versatility competitions

The USDA provided inspection and violation statistics from 2013, demonstrating the very high rate of violations among big lick horses. In closing, attendees heard the current situation of a trainer who has recently left the big lick industry and his successful search for different training methods to humanely train Tennessee Walking Horses.

Sunday offered an opportunity for attendees to visit Rising Glory Farm, a sound Tennessee Walking Horse farm in Lewisburg, Tennessee, to view Tennessee Walking Horses exhibiting their natural gaits and participating in equine sporting events. Gaited horse clinician Gary Lane shared with riders and the audience ways to develop a horse’s natural gait, and Tennessee riding instructor, Cat Dye, and her students demonstrated numerous fun activities with their Walking Horses.

In addition to FOSH, major sponsors for this conference in 2014 included the American Horse Protection Association, Animal Welfare Institute, the Humane Society of the United States, the National Walking Horse Association, Parelli Education Institute, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, Walking Horse Owners Association, American Association of Equine Practitioners, the American Veterinary Medical Association, David Pruett, Frank Neal and the Tennessee Voters for Animal Protection.

Videos and transcripts from the Sound Horse conference speakers are available at www.soundhorseconference.com.

<https://www.midsouthhorsereview.com/news.php?id=5460>

The logo for HuffPost, featuring the word "HUFFPOST" in white, bold, sans-serif capital letters. The letter "H" is stylized with a green vertical bar to its left, and the letter "T" has a green vertical bar to its right.

POLITICS

This Man Refuses To Be Intimidated By Threat After Testifying On Horse Abuse



By Christina Wilkie

Nov. 19, 2013, 10:11 AM EST | **Updated** Dec. 6, 2017



WASHINGTON -- Less than 24 hours after testifying on Capitol Hill about the [horrificing abuse of championship Tennessee Walking Horses](#), animal welfare advocate Marty Irby received a threatening message from a well-known walking horse trainer. The incident was reported to Capitol Police, who are assessing the situation, Irby said.

The message followed a move by the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association, a leading industry group, aimed at driving Irby and other horse welfare advocates from its leadership ranks.

The [threat came from the Facebook account](#) of Chip Weddington, a Tennessee Walking Horse trainer and childhood friend of Irby's, who wrote, "I don't associate myself with bitch made mother fuckers who sing like little fucking birds to the fucking [Humane Society of the United States] and everybody else ... I hope your gay ass gets what's coming to you soon!!!" If Irby ever approached him, Weddington said he would "knock ur ass smooth out!!!"

Weddington did not respond to requests for comment via phone or through his Facebook account from The Huffington Post. According to [USDA animal welfare reports](#), in 2011 Weddington was suspended from Tennessee Walking Horse shows for a year after inspectors cited him for violating the Horse Protection Act.

Weddington's suspension was for violating the ban on "soring" Tennessee Walking Horses, a process that involves applying burning chemicals to a horse's lower legs in order to cause "sores," then tying chains around the animal's wounds and weights to its hooves, in order

to produce a prized, high-stepping gait. A House Energy and Commerce subcommittee met last Wednesday for a hearing on legislation sponsored by Rep. Ed Whitfield (R-Ky.) that aims to strengthen the prohibition on soring horses.

Irby, 34, [testified at the hearing](#) that the practice is widespread among those who show Tennessee Walking Horses in classes where the highly exaggerated gait, known as the "big lick," is required.

Irby said the ongoing practice of soring is perpetuated by a system of "corrupt [animal welfare] inspections, corrupt judging, corrupt training methods, corrupt business practices ... corrupt horse shows, and corrupt titles." A former world champion Tennessee Walking Horse competitor, Irby said he finally grew disgusted with pretending that soring wasn't an integral part of creating the "big lick."

His decision to become an anti-soring advocate cost him his marriage and his contracting business, Irby told HuffPost. His father, William "Ty" Irby, a Tennessee Walking Horse trainer, no longer speaks to him.

"For a long time I thought I could change this industry from the inside, but I finally realized that I can't. Now I'm on the outside of what used to be my whole world, my friends, my job, my family," Irby said. "But this is where I'm meant to be."

While soring is technically against the law, other Tennessee Walking Horse training practices, such as the use of heavy weights and chains, are still permitted. Irby and other witnesses at the hearing said the legal methods often go hand in hand with the use of soring chemicals, which can include mustard oil, diesel fuel, and kerosene. Trainers who sore horses will typically wrap a horse's front legs with plastic while the chemicals fester beneath woolen wraps, a torturous experience for the animal.

Whitfield's legislation, the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, seeks to ban any artificial devices aimed at changing a horse's natural gait, including weights and chains, and it would require that inspections of Tennessee Walking Horses for signs of soring be performed by USDA certified inspectors. Under current law, the walking horse show industry is largely permitted to regulate itself.

Supporters of the PAST Act include the American Horse Council, the Humane Society of the United States, the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Equine Practitioners, the main industry group of veterinarians who treat horses. The bill also has more than 230 bipartisan co-sponsors.

The chief opponent of the bill is Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.), who [characterized the PAST Act](#) as unnecessary legislation that could hurt the walking horse industry economically. According to "The Tennessean" newspaper, the Performance Show Horse Association, an industry group, [hosted a fundraiser for Blackburn](#) in August at the Tennessee Walking Horse's annual horse show.

Irby served as president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association from 2010 to 2012, and had been nominated to lead the group again for the term beginning in 2014. But just hours after he spoke out in favor of the reform bill, the group unexpectedly announced that it would reconvene its leadership nominating committee. Citing a "procedural error" as the reason for the do-over, the decision nullified the selection process that had resulted in Irby's nomination.

Irby said this was a sham, designed to remove him and others who supported Whitfield's bill from the group's leadership and replace them with those who would continue to turn a blind eye to soring and carry on with "business as usual." A representative for the group did not respond to a request for comment.

According to an email provided by a member of the group, its newly nominated president is Stephen B. Smith, an avid "big lick" enthusiast and a powerful Republican political donor. According to forms listing violators of the Horse Protection Act, Smith was [cited numerous times for soring violations](#) at a Tennessee Walking Horse show in the late 1980's.

Smith and his family are major donors to GOP lawmakers in Tennessee, including Blackburn, the chief opponent of the PAST Act. Since 1989, Smith, his wife Denise, and their son Stephen B. Smith, Jr., have donated [more than \\$270,000](#) to Republican political campaigns, most of them in Tennessee.

While the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association did not respond to questions from HuffPost about Irby's ouster or the selection of Smith to replace him, the group did [send a letter to Congress](#) detailing its opposition to the PAST Act. Signed by current president Rob Cornelius, the letter states that due to "budgetary costs and resulting economic damage, the [PAST Act] is simply not something our country needs at this time."

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/tennessee-walking-horse_n_4299886

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POLITICS

Why This Congresswoman Opposes Effort To End Horrifying Horse Abuse



By **Christina Wilkie**

Nov. 16, 2013, 09:17 AM EST | **Updated** Dec. 6, 2017

[Breaking News](#)

WASHINGTON -- The cruel practice of "soring" championship gaited horses by wrapping their hooves in corrosive chemicals and then applying chains or bands to the wounds in order to create an artificially high-stepping gait came under heightened scrutiny this week in Congress.

Kentucky Republican Rep. Ed Whitfield has introduced [a bill](#) to strengthen the decades-old ban on soring gaited horses. So far, Whitfield has garnered 233 co-sponsors from both parties, a difficult task in the highly polarized House of Representatives. But at a hearing of the Energy and Commerce Committee on Wednesday, Whitfield's bill was met with opposition from his fellow Republican, Tennessee Rep. Marsha Blackburn.

Kentucky and Tennessee are home to the bulk of the industry for gaited show horses, in which breeds like the Tennessee Walking Horse are paraded around show rings for major prize money in intense competitions. To create the signature high-stepped gait, trainers often use heavy weights or painful chains on the horses' hooves. What may look to the audience like a happy horse prancing is actually a horse flinching -- the animal lifts its legs higher because putting them on the ground is painful.

Whitfield's bill, called the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, would prohibit the use of any artificial tools to make horses hold their legs higher and stiffen maximum penalties for those who break existing Horse Protection Act statutes. It would also require that horse inspectors looking for soring be licensed by the USDA, and prohibit those with financial interests in the show industry from acting as inspectors. Tennessee Democratic Rep. Steve Cohen is also a leading sponsor of the bill.

Blackburn, who is vice chair of the subcommittee that held the hearing and one of the top Republican women in the House, spoke out against the bill. "This legislation brings excessive regulatory burdens on the walking horse industry and could potentially eliminate the entire industry and thus the entire breed," Blackburn told the witnesses. The lawmaker argued that the show-horse industry's compliance with the current ban on soring is around 97 percent, thereby making any tougher inspections unnecessary.

Blackburn did not respond to a request for comment from The Huffington Post.

Current law bans the use of soring chemicals, but not the use of weighted horseshoes, hoof bands and other devices. Supporters of the PAST Act say the currently legal devices go hand-in-hand with chemical soring. As it stands, the walking horse industry is largely allowed to self-regulate whether owners and trainers abide by the law. And it reports its own -- remarkably high -- compliance rates.

But when independent USDA inspectors showed up in Blackburn's home state in 2012 for the gaited horse industry's splashy annual show, known as the Celebration, they found that [76 percent](#) of a random sample of nearly 200 horses tested positive for chemicals commonly used in soring. Donna Benefield, a witness at the congressional hearing Wednesday who has administered USDA-certified horse inspection programs for the past 25 years, said these chemicals can include [blistering mustard oil, lighter fluid and salicylic acid](#).

A 2012 expose by ABC News (above) contained gruesome footage of one of the Tennessee Walking Horse industry's top trainers, Jackie McConnell, soring horses. McConnell, who [pled guilty](#) to violating the Horse Protection Act, can be seen beating horses with a pipe while they lie in their stalls. Horses are also shown with chains wrapped around deliberately-inflicted wounds on their hooves. In one especially disturbing clip, McConnell repeatedly electrocutes a horse.

Marty Irby, a former world-champion Tennessee Walking Horse competitor who recently became an anti-soring advocate, spoke to the committee on Wednesday about the industry's problem. He said he became fed up with pretending that the abuse shown by ABC wasn't a common practice.

"Should I continue to perpetuate the lie that the padded and chained performance Tennessee Walking Horses are mostly sound and a few bad [trainers] sore them, or should I recognize the truth: that all padded and chained Tennessee Walking Horses are either sore or have been sored?" Irby said. Irby, 34, comes from a long line of championship Tennessee Walking Horse breeders, and he told HuffPost that taking a public stand against the abuse has cost him his marriage, his career and his relationship with his parents. In August, Blackburn observed horse inspections in person at the 2013 Celebration, the same annual horse show where inspectors found the shockingly high violation rate in 2012. The Tennessean reported that the top walking horse industry lobbying group, the Performance Show Horse Association, [hosted a campaign fundraiser for Blackburn](#) during her visit. Guests paid [\\$100 a ticket](#), according to the Tennessean.

Despite Blackburn's attendance at the show, and the heightened caution following the damning ABC video, the 2013 Celebration still had major problems. Among them was the [early elimination](#) of Honors, one of the show's most popular horses and a past champion, after inspectors found evidence of soring on his leg. And two horses belonging to Terry Dotson, the then-president of the PSHA, [also failed their inspections](#), according to the Tennessean. Just days after hosting Blackburn, Dotson resigned his position as PSHA's president.

THE SACRAMENTO BEE

Congress scrutinizes show-horse industry practice of ‘soring’

BY ALI WATKINS - MCCLATCHY WASHINGTON BUREAU UPDATED NOVEMBER 13, 2013 3:11 PM

A bill that would safeguard show horses from painful practices designed to heighten their crowd-pleasing high gaits sparked a lively debate Wednesday on Capitol Hill.

A House Energy and Commerce Committee panel heard testimony on proposed amendments to the 1970 Horse Protection Act from Rep. Ed Whitfield, R-Ky., that would place substantial penalties on any show horse owner caught using a practice known as “soring.”

His measure also would add independent overseers to the largely self-policed industry. Although the Horse Protection Act outlawed soring, Whitfield and more than 220 co-sponsors of his legislation claim that it’s still widely practiced throughout the walking horse industry.

Soring dates to the beginnings of the famed Tennessee walking horse tradition, whose horses are renowned as some of the industry’s most elite competitors because of their exaggerated gait. The tactics employed in the more-than-a-century-old practice include weighting a horse’s hooves or inserting nails and sharp objects into the tender parts of the foot. The high-step gait is often the horse’s pained response.

At the hearing before the Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing and Trade, industry supporters and critics agreed that the high-step gait wasn’t natural for the animals.

“I’ve seen horses’ feet look like pizza with the cheese pulled off of it. That’s how horrific this practice is,” said Marty Irby, the international director of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders’ and Exhibitors’ Association.

Though many witnesses agreed that soring should be outlawed, officials and critics sparred over how much the practice persists, with industry officials saying the walking horse community has largely eliminated soring on its own.

“The current compliance rates reported by the (U.S. Department of Agriculture) indicate the welfare of the horse is being protected and the industry is achieving the goal of eliminating soring,” said Dr. John Bennett, a veterinarian who testified on behalf of the Performance Show Horse Association. He said the compliance rates in recent years had been as high as 98 percent.

But critics charge that the numbers are skewed and that more advanced strategies of avoiding detection have allowed the practice to continue.

“This industry has had over 40 years to rid itself of this abuse, and for numerous reasons has not only resisted, but has refused reform at every turn,” said Donna Benefield, the vice president of the International Walking Horse Association. “They have maintained, controlled and regulated soring through fear and intimidation for many years.”

Whitfield’s bill also faces resistance from those who say enforcement could have a substantial impact on the industry’s jobs, including Rep. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., who said the loss could be in the thousands.

Whitfield denied that his bill would have a severe economic impact.

“Let me just say, Tennessee walking horses are being shown in other parts of the country. . . . They don’t use the soring, and it’s not destroying the industry,” he said. “Everyone that I’ve talked to has indicated that there’s no reason for these shows not to go on.”

Among other things, his bill bans the use of chains, weights and any other device intended to alter a horse’s natural gait that isn’t “strictly protective or therapeutic.” It would restrict a person from ordering a horse to undergo soring before competition or auction and would raise financial penalties as well, from \$3,000 to \$5,000, for owners caught using soring. The bill also would raise the possible disqualification time from three years to five years.

<https://www.sacbee.com/entertainment/living/pets/article2582643.html>



Roy Exum: Horseman's Leap Of Faith

Wednesday, November 20, 2013 - by Roy Exum



Roy Exum

Back in July I got a deeply-touching letter from a horseman who had finally had enough of the sleazy side of the Tennessee Walking Horse industry. Marty Irby, a mover and a shaker within the seedy "Big Lick" segment that sores and abuses the beautiful Walkers so they'll prance in a grotesque manner, was ready to go clean.

The Big Lick bullies roared back, his boss firing him and his father still not speaking, but Irby has stayed strong and is determined to "save the breed, not just end the torture and cheating" that is rampant among the scofflaws centered in Shelbyville. He testified last week at a Congressional hearing in Washington, speaking on behalf of "sound," or healthy, horse lovers who want the chains and pads banned from the animals, better inspections and stiffer federal penalties in House Bill 1518.

Predictably, within the next 24 hours Irby received a threatening message on his Facebook account from a Big Lick trainer who was identified by the Huffington Post Tuesday afternoon as Chip Weddington, a known violator of the federal Horse Protection Act who was suspended for a year in 2011 after inspectors found horses in his care had been sores with caustic chemical substances.

The HuffPost had an earlier story on Saturday that revealed a Tennessee Congresswoman, Marsha Blackburn, was actively trying to stop pending legislation and mentioned the Republican from Brentwood had been given a reception – and a check for \$70,000 – by the Big Lick in August. Now the same columnist has written another, entitled, "This Man Refuses To Be Intimidated By Threat After Testifying On Horse Abuse."

In the Tuesday story columnist Christina Wilkie alleged that Weddington, a childhood friend of Irby's in the horse world, wrote on Facebook: "I don't associate myself with (expletive)-made mother (expletive) who sing like little (expletive) birds to the (expletive) [Humane Society of the United States] and everybody else ... I hope your gay (expletive) gets what's coming to you soon!!!" Weddington added that if Irby ever approached him, he would "knock ur (sic) smooth (expletive) out."

According to the HuffPost writer the matter was still being investigated by Capitol police late Tuesday afternoon.

The message comes as the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association's leaders are attempting to remove Irby and other sound-horse advocates from its board and nominate a Big Lick leader named Steven B. Smith as its president. Smith, the state campaign chairman for Senator Lamar Alexander, and his family are big contributors to the Tennessee Republican Party.

Smith has served on the Breeders and Exhibitors Association before but, after he was reported cited for several soring violations in the 1980s, he stepped away from the Big Lick. HuffPost reported Tuesday that Smith, his wife Denise, and son Steven Jr. have given \$270,000 to the Republican Party since 1989. No politicians from Tennessee have endorsed the pending legislation.

During the hearings last week, Irby gave eyewitness testimony to a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee that soring is continuing and it includes "corrupt inspections, corrupt judging, corrupt business practices ... corrupt horse shows and corrupt titles"

But for the past year he has begged his friends in the horse industry to understand what he now does. That is why this summer he wrote about his "Leap of Faith," why he turned away from soring. It is a beautiful story but too long for one reading in its entirety. So as Marty Irby is being threatened and cursed this seems like the perfect time to share what he wrote.

* * *

MY LEAP OF FAITH

By Marty Irby

A few days ago, I had a revelation while driving to the World Versatility Show and thinking about all that has happened. There are sore horse people who know God, and there are sound horse people who don't. Many of the sore horse people, who know God, don't necessarily know they are sore horse people. I know this because I was once one of them.

Soring has become such a culture for generations, that many who were raised in this just don't see it. Their hearts are hardened, and they are blind to what is really going on. They think using Gojo or hand cleaner on horses' feet is okay, and I used to think that way too. The fact is the rest of the world doesn't see it that way, and Gojo makes a horses foot sensitive so that he will react to a chain and step high, stick his backend, and shake his head a little harder.

What do you think that horse feels when that chain hits his sensitive foot? Why does one utilize Gojo? For the sore horse people who know God, please know that Gojo is soring, and if you will pray and think about it long enough then God will show you the truth. For the sound horse people who don't know God, please know that I would not be here with you all now if it were not for Him.

God is the reason that I was slowly brought from having both feet in the sore horse camp to having both feet in the sound horse camp. God is not merely some big, grey headed guy in the sky as many think. God is love. God is everything. God lives within each of us, whether we realize it or not. God put The Tennessee Walking Horse on Earth to help mankind, and for God's glory. What an amazing horse we have, that has saved so many people in so many different ways.

I ask each of you to please do me one favor. Whether you are a sore horse person who believes in God or a sound horse person who does not please pray that God will open your heart and mind, and

will awaken you. Please pray that God will show you the truth about who "HE" really is, and what you should do for The Tennessee Walking Horse and its future.

If this story does nothing more than touch two people in the world, then it will have served its purpose, and have been worth writing. Always know that if you follow God, do the right thing, and even with nothing left in your life but Faith, then he will take care of you. Many of you may think this story is about the Tennessee Walking Horse, and for years I thought all of my efforts were, but that is not so.

This story is about God, and so is my progression, because that is what the Tennessee Walking Horse is really and truly all about.

Everything good in my life today and everything good that has ever happened comes first from God, and second from the Tennessee Walking Horse, even the ability to write this story because God gave me two hands, and I received a full paid college scholarship because of the Tennessee Walking Horse. What I do each day I owe to "Him" and our horse.

For God's Glory, Long Live the Tennessee Walking Horse!

* * *

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<https://www.chattanooga.com/2013/11/20/263894/Roy-Exum-Horsemans-Leap-Of-Faith.aspx>



Law banning abusive horse training will require more USDA involvement

11/13/13 4:24 PM By [Sarah Gonzalez](#)

WASHINGTON, Nov. 13, 2013— Veterinarians and Congress members weighed the risks and benefits of passing an amendment to the Horse Protection Act that would require USDA to accredit all inspectors involved in Tennessee Walking Horse shows during a House Energy and Commerce subcommittee hearing today. Witnesses representing several aspects of the industry testified on [H.R. 1518](#), the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act.

Rep. Ed Whitfield, R-Ky., introduced the PAST Act on April 11. It now has 223 cosponsors in the House, and its companion legislation in the Senate (S. 1406) has 26 cosponsors.

Horse soring, which enhances the walking horse's natural gait to create an exaggerated step known as the "Big Lick," has been illegal in shows, sales or exhibits since the passage of the 1970 Horse Protection Act (HPA). However, the practice is still prevalent in walking horse performance circles, as concluded by a 2010 USDA Office of Inspector General [report](#). The training method, which involves deliberately inflicting pain to enhance the gait, is found most prevalently in Tennessee Walking Horses, Racking Horses, and Spotted Saddle Horses.

The American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP), and more than 100 veterinary, horse industry, and animal protection groups endorsed the PAST Act. The AVMA maintains the PAST Act is necessary to make the actual act of soring illegal, as well as to ban incentives to sore.

Budget constraints restrict the Horse Protection Program, which sends USDA officials to shows to oversee horse inspections for signs of soring, said AVMA's Executive Vice President Dr. Ron DeHaven. He noted that Congress "must take a strong stand against the abusive practice of soring and commit the necessary funding for the USDA to adequately enforce the HPA."

Whitfield's bill would eliminate self-regulation by the industry by removing the Horse Industry Organization ("HIO") system, which designates industry members as inspectors, and placing responsibility for all inspection and enforcement with the USDA.

The 1970 Horse Protection Act outlawed the practice of soring in shows and sales, but the use of "action devices," including padded horseshoes and chains that can enhance soring wounds, is currently protected. The PAST Act would restrict the use of these action devices as well as administer the new inspection program through USDA.

DeHaven maintained that although padded shoes and action devices are not acts of soring themselves, they provide an incentive to injure a horse through soring by enhancing the effects of the practice.

After 40 years, "our lack of ability to self-regulate has brought our breed to this crossroads," noted Marty Irby, international director and former president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' & Exhibitors' Association. Irby testified in favor of the PAST Act, reciting his experience in the industry as well as his family's involvement in soring and the Tennessee Walking Horse performance division.

"We tried to save the performance horse and now it's about trying to save the breed," Irby said. "We must let go of the sored padded performance horse and step soundly into the future. Otherwise, we will not realize any future at all."

Irby maintained that the segment of the industry using action devices is the only sector commonly using soring to enhance show performance. "The problem is not in the normally-shod walking horse," he noted. "This bill eliminates this [performance] division, which is where the problem is and is less than 10 percent of our breed."

However, Julius Johnson, Commissioner of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, said rural Tennessee would suffer if the legislation is enacted.

"I believe the proposed legislation is based more on perception than sound science," Johnson said. "It will potentially eliminate the walking horse altogether."

James Hickey, Jr., President of the American Horse Council, supported PAST, calling it "a narrowly drafted bill that is focused on soring...and does not adversely affect other segments of the horse industry that are not soring horses."

Due to this practice in the performance horse sector, a stigma is attached to the breed as a whole, noted Teresa Bippen, president of Friends of Sound Horses.

"Even I have to explain that my Tennessee Walking Horses are not show horses," she said. "Good horsemen don't want to be associated with soring or participate in shows where soring takes place."

Dr. John Bennett of Equine Services, LLC, testified on behalf of the Performance Show Horse Association. He said the elimination of the shoes and action devices outlined in the bill define the breed's gait and classifications. "Several divisions of show horses will be eliminated which represents the elimination of 85 percent of the Tennessee Walking Horses currently showing," according to his testimony.

Bennett, along with Rep. Marsha Blackburn, R-Tenn., emphasized that USDA recently reported a 98 percent HPA compliance rate over the past several years.

"While 100 percent compliance is of course the goal, a 98+ percent rate of compliance based on the subjective inspections performed on these animals as part of a competitive event indicates that the industry takes this issue very seriously and has made great strides in eliminating soring," Bennett said.

Several others, including Dr. DeHaven, contested the variability of this compliance rate due to the conflicts of interest that exist in the current inspection program.

"Those compliance rates are based on a self-policing program," DeHaven said. "Statistics also show that inspectors are ten times more likely to find a violation when they have a USDA representative looking over their shoulder."

DeHaven said 78 percent of violations during the 2012 show year were found when USDA was present, even though USDA is present at less than 10 percent of shows.

“The PAST Act represents a unique opportunity to once and for all end the practice of soring to our nation’s walking horses,” DeHaven said. “I feel this bill is necessary to stop this culture of abuse that has existed for more than forty years in the industry.”

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Chattanooga Times Free Press

Trainer says horse soring widespread

February 28, 2012 | by Todd South | Copyright © 2022



Jeffery Bradford, right, walks with his attorney Anthony Martinez while on their way to the Joel W. Solomon Federal Building to be sentenced for horse protection act violations and fraud Monday afternoon.

Barney Davis lifted wooden blocks, metal chains, bolts and washers in his hands, showing the evidence to the judge.

Davis explained how he and nearly all walking horse trainers use the tools, along with "mustard oil" -- a mix of acid and kerosene or other chemicals -- to tenderize and injure horse hooves. By driving bolts, wrapping chains and slathering corrosive liquids on the animals' hooves, trainers such as Davis can make them lift their legs higher and win fancy ribbons and trophies for the horse owners. The practice eventually can cripple the animals, he told U.S. District Judge Harry "Sandy" Mattice on Monday.

The practice, known as "horse soring," is illegal under the federal Horse Protection Act. Davis, of Lewisburg, Tenn., and three co-defendants have been sentenced after pleading guilty to charges related to abusing horses.

"Every walking horse that enters into a show is sored," Davis said. "They've got to be sored to walk. There ain't no good way to put it but that's how it is."

The allegations of widespread horse abuse astounded Mattice, who likened the abuse to cockfighting. If the practice is as pervasive as Davis described, Mattice said, Congress has promoted disrespect for the law by criminalizing the conduct but not enforcing it.

Mattice enforced it. For the first time in 20 years the crime has been prosecuted in the United States.

He sentenced Davis, 39, to one year in federal prison and a \$4,000 fine conspiracy to violate the Horse Protection Act, witness tampering and transporting and entering a sored horse into a walking horse competition. Police arrested Davis while he was free awaiting trial on the soring charge when investigators video-recorded him helping another trainer "rasp" a horse's hooves to fit it for blocks. He's been in custody since July 2011 and will be eligible for release this July. As part of his plea agreement, he will appear in an educational video to speak out against horse spring.

Horse Soring definition

"Soring is a cruel and abusive practice used to accentuate a horse's gait. It may be accomplished by irritating or blistering a horse's forelegs through the application of chemicals such as mustard oil or the use of mechanical devices. Walking horses are known for possessing a naturally high gait, but in order to be successful in competition their natural gait is often exaggerated. The exaggerated gait can be achieved with proper training and considerable time, however, some horse exhibitors, owners, and trainers have chosen to use improper and inhumane training methods to shorten the time it would take to produce a higher gait without abusive practices." --Dr. Rachel Cezar, Horse Protection National Coordinator, U.S. Department of Agriculture

His co-defendants -- Christen Altman, 26, of Shelbyville, Tenn., and Jeffery Bradford, 33, of Lewisburg, Tenn. -- each received one year of probation and \$1,000 fines. A fourth co-defendant, Paul Blackburn, 35, was sentenced to one year probation and a \$1,000 fine in January.

All three co-defendants pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor conspiracy charge. They must write an article for newspaper publication describing the practice and those who participate in it, as well as the long- and short-term damage done to horses through the abuse.

Former U.S. Sen. Joe Tydings of Maryland wrote the Horse Protection Act and submitted it to become law in 1968. The lifelong equestrian and member of the last U.S. Army horse cavalry unit was disgusted when he learned of the practice.

"Anybody that's brought up with horses, to see something like that makes their blood curdle," Tydings said in a phone interview Monday.

Tydings lost re-election to the Senate in 1970, shortly after the bill became law. He went on to work as a private lawyer and only learned decades later that his bill had been funded by only \$500,000 annually and had not received a

budget increase since the 1970s until last year when funding rose to about \$700,000.

Tydings said that wealthy owners of competition walking horses have used political action committee contributions and influence to block increased funding to enforce the act.

"The majority of people who show, work with walking horses, do not get involved in this," he said. "However, the most powerful owners and trainers do."

Tennessee Walking Horse Breeder's and Exhibitor's Association President Marty Irby sent a written statement in response to the horse soring sentencing.

"We, at TWHBEA, are unequivocal in our stance that horse abuse should not be tolerated, and we support rigorous but fair enforcement of the Horse Protection Act," Irby wrote.

The association did not respond directly to Davis' allegations that the practice encompasses a majority of the walking horse industry.

Contact staff writer Todd South at tsouth@timesfreepress.com or 423-757-6347.

<https://www.timesfreepress.com/news/news/story/2012/feb/28/chattanooga-trainer-says-horse-soring-widespread/71729/>
