

**Statement of  
Congressman Steve Cohen  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on Consumer Protection and Commerce  
Legislative Hearing to Protect Consumers and Strengthen the Economy  
5/26/2022**

I want to thank Chairwoman Schakowsky and Ranking Member Bilirakis for holding this legislative hearing today and providing the opportunity to examine a slew of legislation that would protect American consumers and strengthen our economy. I am especially appreciative of the inclusion of my bill, H.R. 5441, the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, which I introduced with the esteemed Chairwoman, as well as with Representatives Brian Fitzpatrick and Vern Buchanan.

The PAST Act would protect Tennessee Walking Horses and related breeds from soring, which is the intentional infliction of pain on horses' feet and legs using caustic chemicals, chains, weighted shoes, hard objects, cutting, and other gruesome techniques to force them to perform a pain-based artificially high-stepping gait known as the "Big Lick."

Congress passed the Horse Protection Act more than 50 years ago to end the abuse of soring, but a 2010 audit by USDA's Inspector General found persistent, rampant soring. In 2017, the USDA Office of Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) moved to finalize a rule to strengthen the agency's Horse Protection Act regulations by incorporating some of the major tenets of the PAST Act. However, the rule was not implemented.

The PAST Act would codify these regulatory changes into law and strengthen penalties. Specifically, it would eliminate self-policing by requiring the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to assign a licensed inspector if the show's management indicates intent to hire one with preference given to licensed or accredited veterinarians. It would also prohibit the use of action devices such as chains that rub up and down an already-sore leg and pads that conceal sharp or hard objects on the limbs of specific horse breeds that have a history of being the primary victims of soring. Additionally, it would increase consequences on individuals caught soring a horse, including by raising the penalty from a misdemeanor to a felony, subject to up to three years' incarceration, and increasing fines from \$3,000 to \$5,000. It would also permanently disqualify three-time violators from participating in horse shows, exhibitions, sales or auctions.

The PAST Act currently has 256 bipartisan cosponsors including 208 Democrats and 48 Republicans, and its Senate companion, S. 2295, which was introduced by Senators Mike Crapo and Mark Warner, has 52 bipartisan cosponsors with 46 Democrats, four Republicans and two Independents. In 2019, a bipartisan majority of the House of Representatives passed the PAST Act by a vote of 333-96 to end this cruel practice. Unfortunately, the full Senate did not vote on this legislation, though the identical bill was approved by the Senate Commerce Committee back in 2014.

The plague of soring has been a shameful stain on the Tennessee Walking Horse industry for more than six decades, and it is long past time to eradicate this indefensible practice. The natural

gait of the Tennessee Walking Horse is a wonder to behold and has long been revered by horse lovers. The practice of soring, burning, cutting and lacerating these beautiful creatures just to exaggerate their gait and win horse shows is beyond reprehensible. There is no ribbon, no prize nor championship worth the price of one's humanity.

Throughout my legislative career, both as a state Senator and as a Member of Congress, I have worked to raise awareness of and combat horse soring and have been part of the leadership team for the PAST Act since the measure was first introduced in 2013. I greatly appreciate the Consumer Protection and Commerce Subcommittee's consideration of my bill and look forward to its hopeful passage by the full Energy and Commerce Committee in the near future.