

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 28, 2014

Dear Colleague,

We write today to invite you to cosponsor S.2193, the Horse Protection Act Amendments of 2014. This legislation would end the contemptible practice of soring in the Tennessee Walking Horse industry while preserving the century old tradition of the Tennessee Walking Horse.

Our legislation builds on a proposal introduced in the House of Representatives by Rep. Marsha Blackburn (R-Tenn.) and Rep. Hal Rogers (R-Ky.). Our legislation would give state officials and experts—those with more industry expertise than the federal government— authority to ensure consistent oversight of inspections. It would also require objective scientific testing, prevent conflicts of interest, require input from veterinarians, and suspend horses from shows if they are found to be sore.

The American Farm Bureau supports our legislation, and the Tennessee Farm Bureau said our legislation would “allow the vast majority of horse owners, trainers and breeders and those who play by the rules to confidently participate in the horse shows.” Additionally, our legislation is endorsed by the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders’ and Exhibitors’ Association, The Performance Show Horse Association, and the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration, which is the breed’s World Grand Championship show.

A competing bill, advocated by the Humane Society of the United States, S. 1406, the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act, would expand the USDA’s current jurisdiction over horse show inspections, which has already proven to be ineffective and would likely increase costs to U.S. taxpayers. The bill would also ban many industry-standard training and show devices, and has been described by the Performance Show Horse Association as legislation that would “do little more than create another layer of bureaucracy at the USDA while denying horse enthusiasts the opportunity” to participate in competitions that are the basis of the Tennessee Walking Horse industry.

In baseball, if a player illegally uses steroids, you punish the player – you don’t shut down America’s national pastime. With Tennessee Walking Horse shows, when trainers, owners or riders illegally sore a horse, we should find a more effective way to punish and stop them – not shut down an industry in our states. The problem with the Humane Society bill is that it expands the footprint of the federal government—the entity that has historically proven to be ineffective in regulating horse show inspections— over the Walking Horse Industry and destroys a world renowned industry.

We invite you to join us and support a common sense approach that would end the contemptible practice of soring while preserving the Tennessee Walking Horse industry. Attached is a summary of our legislation, and please contact Curtis Swager in Senator Alexander’s office (224-4944) or Tate Bennett in Senator McConnell’s office (224-2541) if you have any questions or would like to be a cosponsor.

Sincerely,



Lamar Alexander
United States Senator



Mitch McConnell
United States Senator

Jeffery Howard: Tennessee Walking Horse legislation on slippery slope

Jeffery Howard is chairman of the Communications Committee for the Performance Show Horse Association.

Sunday, April 27, 2014

As is the case with most commentary from the Humane Society of the United States, a recent opinion piece in the News Sentinel was long on hyperbole and short on facts. Comparing the practice of soring to an abscessed tooth may be a proper analogy. But to suggest that the practice is the industry standard does a terrible disservice to readers and the men and women who derive their livelihoods from the Tennessee Walking Horse industry.

Those of us who work and support the industry fully recognized that the practice was once commonplace. But by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's own standards, the industry is between 96 and 99 percent compliant with inspections to detect soring. What other industry can boast a compliance rate that high? And again, those are USDA numbers, not an artificial report generated by the industry.

There are two bills pending in Congress on regulating the industry. The major difference between the Blackburn/Alexander bill and the Whitfield/Ayotte bill is that the former eliminates the practice, while the latter eliminates the horse. Under provisions of Whitfield/Ayotte, also known as the PAST Act, 85 percent of these equine athletes would be eliminated from competition because of the weighted shoe provision. That's 85 percent of a competitive field that generates more than \$3.2 billion in economic impact and employs more than 20,000 men and women directly and indirectly.

Blackburn/Alexander introduces the concept of objective testing to determine whether the Horse Protection Act has been violated. Right now, testing is subjective, and in some cases even USDA inspectors have differing opinions as to whether a violation has occurred.

If anything, our breed is pampered, not abused. That's why we have a special class for older horses — some showing in their 20s. How many other equine competitors can say that? Even the legendary John Henry was retired from thoroughbred racing at age 10.

The focus on making the horse a companion animal is on Tennessee Walkers right now. We're squarely in the crosshairs of U.S. Rep. Ed Whitfield, a Kentuckian, and his wife, Constance, who lobbies for the Humane Society. If they're successful in passage of the PAST Act, what's next? Every breed in every form of competition that uses a weighted shoe would be eliminated. Any use of action devices would extend beyond

the Walking Horse to other breeds.

And one only needs look to our neighbors to the north — Kentucky — to see where else the Humane Society might focus its attention. The Rolex Kentucky Three Day Event brought horses and riders from around the world to compete in dressage, eventing, cross-country and driving competitions — all of which have been criticized, but not yet ostracized, by animal rights groups.

And then we have “the most exciting two minutes in sports” in the upcoming Kentucky Derby. Will the focus this year be on the morning line, the racing form and tip sheets, or will the new focus be on the PETA expose that purported widespread use of drugs, masking agents and stimulation devices in thoroughbred racing?

Many other breed registers have endorsed the PAST Act under the false pretense that it affects only the three specific breeds outlined in the language of the law. What they fail to realize is that if the PAST Act is successful in shutting down the Tennessee Walking Horse industry, someone else is going to be next.

Standardbred?

Saddlebred?

Thoroughbred?

Quarter Horse?

Arabian endurance runners?

Or how about the carriage horses in New York, Charleston and New Orleans, where tours are a way of life for horse and driver?

The Humane Society will not be content until the horse is eliminated from work and competition. They have said as much in previous statements.

Don't be misled by graphic analogies used only to incense the public. Stay with the facts. The industry's self-policing is working. Blackburn/Alexander takes it a step further to bringing science and objectivity into the discussion.

If you want to be incensed about something, consider that the Humane Society of the United States is a money-making, lobbying machine that took in more than \$133 million, according to the last tax filing on record. How much of that went to support local animal shelters? Less than 2 percent.

It's obvious the Humane Society cares more about fundraising, politics and policy than it does about protection of horses or any other farm animal.



© 2014 Scripps Newspaper Group — Online