

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 7, 2014

The Honorable Thomas Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
United States Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing to request that the Department undertake a substantial and active on-the-ground role to ensure strict enforcement of the Horse Protection Act at this year's Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration.

Our request is based on several important concerns: the decertification proceedings pending against the SHOW HIO, which is owned by the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration in Shelbyville, Tennessee; recent reports that since late May SHOW's DQPs have not been effective in identifying and disqualifying sore horses at shows they inspected; and the Celebration's decision to include five HPA violators as the five Celebration judges. We are also concerned by the Celebration's support for challenges made by the Performance Show Horse Association (PSHA) to scientifically-based inspection techniques implemented by the Department this year.

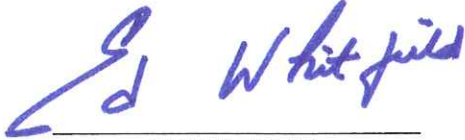
In addition, the Celebration's open collaboration with groups that oppose the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act, which we have sponsored, indicates that the sponsor of the breed's premier annual horse show is not committed to ending soring practices. In our view, soring will continue unabated unless the changes contemplated by the PAST Act are implemented. The Celebration's vigorous resistance to those changes, and continued advocacy for the "big lick" horse, indicate that the Celebration's financial interests are dependent on maintaining an artificial pain-based gait that is well understood to be produced by soring.

We urge the Department to aggressively inspect horses in each class, both pre-show and post-show, each night of the Celebration – not merely monitor the performance of DQPs. We expect that the Department's inspection protocol will include the use of thermography and pastern swabs to identify foreign substances, and that these tools will be part of the enforcement process, not just for information gathering. In addition, because of the increasing incidence of pressure shoeing in recent years, we ask that the Department make good on past threats to remove shoes and pad packages as part of its inspection. This should be done on a random basis, as well as for any horse whose appearance, gait and behavior suggests that it may have been pressure-shod, especially in aged stallion classes and for the World Grand Championship.

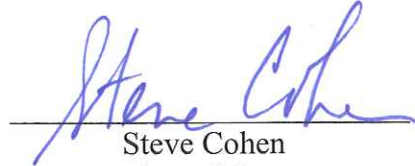
Finally, we expect that the Department's Office of General Counsel will promptly initiate enforcement proceedings under the Act against violators identified by VMOs. We believe that the small number of enforcement cases prosecuted in recent years, compared to the substantial number of violations documented by VMOs, has tended to undermine the work of the VMOs and encourage violators.

We recognize and appreciate the important steps that the Department has taken to improve Horse Protection Act enforcement, and look forward to their continuation during the Celebration.

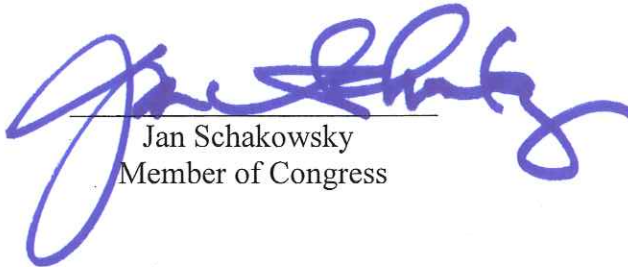
cc: Todd Batta, Assistant Secretary, Office of Congressional Relations
Kevin A. Shea, Administrator, APHIS
Chester A. Gipson, DVM, Deputy Administrator, APHIS
Rachel Cezar, DVM, Horse Protection National Coordinator



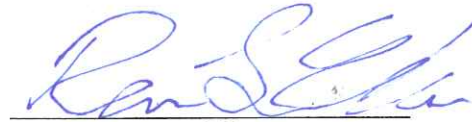
Ed Whitfield
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Steve Cohen
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Jan Schakowsky
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Renee Ellmers
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Walter Jones
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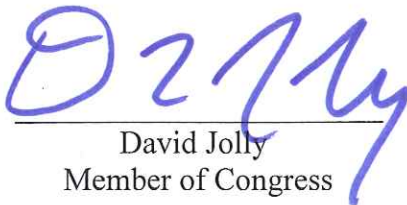
Raul Grijalva
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Gloria Negrete McLeod
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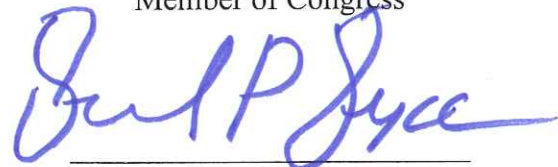
David Jolly
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Vern Buchanan
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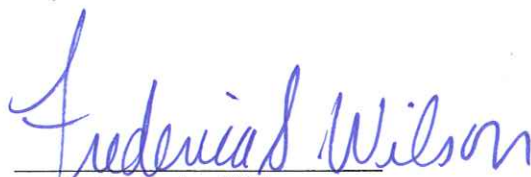
Patrick Meehan
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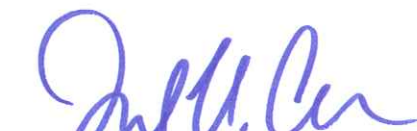
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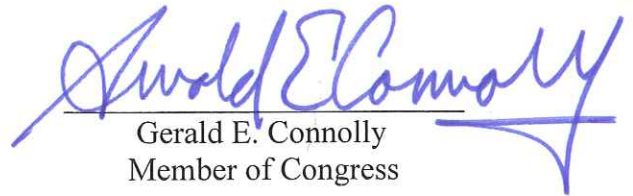

Suzan DelBene
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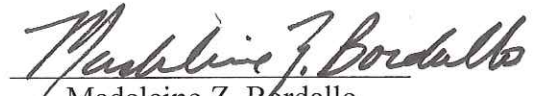
Mark Takano
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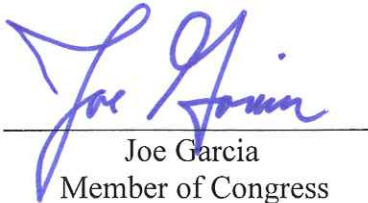
Gerald E. Connolly
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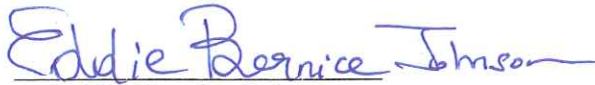
Eliot L. Engel
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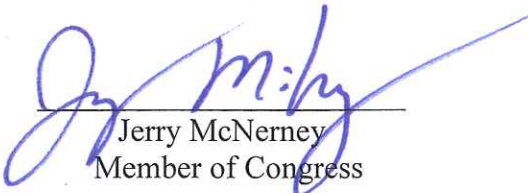
Rosa L. DeLauro
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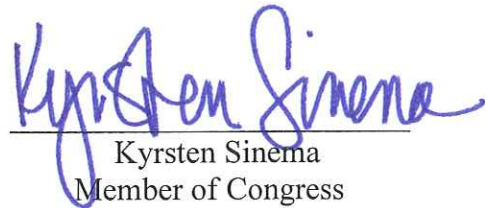
Eddie Bernice Johnson
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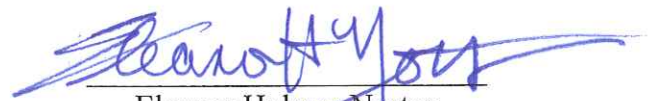
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Lucille Roybal-Allard
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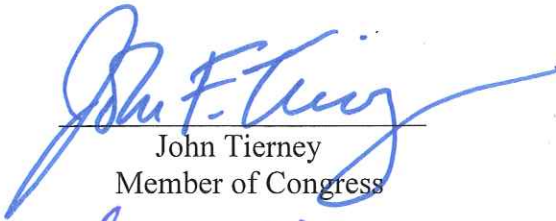
Eleanor Holmes Norton
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Michael R. Turner
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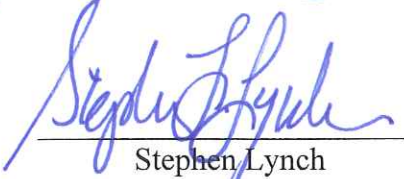
Steve Israel
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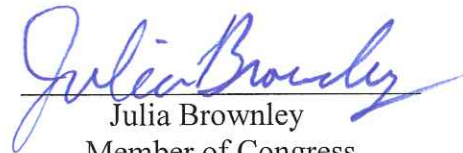
John Tierney
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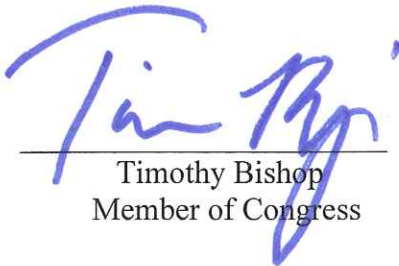
Alan Lowenthal
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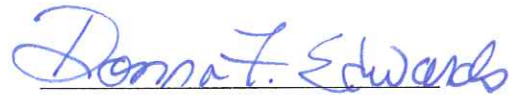
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