

The Elephant in the Room

An article in the February edition of the Corral “*Congress Addressing Horse Slaughter Cruelty in Federal Legislation*” on The Prevention of Equine Cruelty Act of 2009 (H.R. 503) stated this is a very popular bill with wide bipartisan legislative support. There was also an inference that this bill has wide support among equine groups as well. THIS IS NOT TRUE. It is not supported by a majority of the equine industry and there is significant opposition in the US Congress and state legislatures as well.

The reality of the situation is that equine slaughter is the “elephant in the room”. Everyone knows he’s there but no one talks about him. The reason he is there is that he fulfills a need that has not been satisfied by any other means. We need to seriously look at all alternative methods of dealing with this issue before we pass legislation that will most certainly have horrific unintended consequences. The American Horse Council has founded the Unwanted Horse Coalition and is rapidly collecting data on the size of this problem and likely consequences to this proposed legislation.

There is growing opposition to this bill. Seven state chapters of the American Horse Council publicly oppose the bill on their websites. None of them openly supports this bill. The state legislatures of Utah, Arizona, Kansas, Minnesota, Tennessee, South Dakota and Wyoming are on record opposing this legislation. North Dakota, Arkansas, Illinois, Mississippi and Montana are considering legislation to permit the opening of humane equine processing facilities in their states. The National Council of State Legislatures at their national meeting last December has adopted by “an overwhelming majority” a Horse Industry Policy that urges the US Congress to oppose legislation that would restrict the market, transport, processing, or export of horses, to recognize the need for humane horse processing facilities in the United States, and not to interfere with State efforts to establish facilities in the United States

There are three major reasons for opposing this legislation. First and foremost is the passage of this bill will result in an excess of 80,000 to 90,000 horses annually. Existing horse rescues can not come close to handling this number of horses, now or at any time in the foreseeable future. Make no mistake, transport of these horses to Mexico and Canada has resulted in less humane methods used to dispose of these horses. This resulted from the capricious actions of the Texas and Illinois state legislatures, under heavy pressure from humane societies to ban horse slaughter without anticipating the consequences of those actions. Further legislative actions will only compound the issue. We need to address the problem at its’ source, too many unwanted horses. There are many reasons for the excess of unwanted horses, some due to institutional reasons, i.e., racing, and others to individual reasons, e.g. over breeding. We need to keep equine processing in place in the United States where we can insure that it will be controlled to the highest humane standards.

The second reason for opposing this bill is that it takes away another one of our constitutional property rights. Horses are now and have always been designated as livestock (personal property). There are many reasons important to all of us for this designation. If they were not classified as livestock but pets, we would find the government far more intrusive than it is now. We need to stand fast and protect our constitutional rights to manage our property as we determine best for our animals and ourselves. This does not mean that we have to personally be in favor of humane

processing but that we need to maintain and support the rights of others to use it as they see fit. Our biggest adversary in protecting our property rights are radical humane societies and animal rights groups. These organizations, when they can't win an argument on rational grounds, resort to emotions to carry the day. Have you ever read an article in support of H.R. 503 that has not characterized those who oppose it as cruel or greedy or insensitive knuckle draggers or far worse. They revel in the gory details of the inhumane slaughter that takes place outside the US (because of their own doing) and infer that inhumane slaughter takes place in the US as well. Think about it. We have the USDA overseeing and insuring humane slaughter for all species of livestock every day in the US. In truth, for these radical animal rights groups, there is no such thing as humane slaughter! For any species! Primary among these is the Humane Society of the United States, not the same organization as the humane society around the corner from your house that rescues cats and dogs. The Humane Society - US has targeted Ohio and does not have our best interests at heart as they promote their radical agenda.

The third reason to oppose this legislation is that it would remove forever the option of opening humane processing facilities in any state that chooses to do so. As mentioned above, many states are exploring the option to open equine processing plants within their borders. Until we have resolved this problem at its' source and significantly lower the number of unwanted horses, we need to leave as many viable options on the table as possible. The fact that so many states are stepping up is indicative that there is wide support for humane equine processing.

The best way to deal with the "elephant in the room" is to first recognize that he is there and there for a reason that can't be overlooked. None of us raises our horses to eat, but for purposes that bring pleasure to all of us. We all look forward to the day where there is no need for the elephant. What can we do? We can work to maintain our right for humane equine processing at home while we manage the problem of unwanted horses. Right now steps are underway through education, reduced breeding programs and market forces to reduce the size of this problem. Or we can allow H.R. 503 to pass and deal with the unintended consequences of 90,000 unwanted horses annually. What happens to the overflow that can't be absorbed by the our equine rescues. Use your imagination but what we don't want is a bigger elephant. Ultimately what happens to the elephant is up to us. The equine industry, all of us, can move to act responsibly to solve this problem ourselves or we can allow the government to do it for us.

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