

THE MYTH OF THE UNWANTED HORSE: *How many are there and why are they slaughtered?*

Having failed to convince the American public or a majority of Congress that horse slaughter is a form of humane euthanasia or an appropriate means of horse disposal for horse owners, the horse slaughter lobby has begun issuing dramatic, varying and unsubstantiated public statements about (a) the number of horses who will either suffer abandonment or neglect or require costly care in the absence of horse slaughter and (b) the need for horse slaughter as a means for humanely euthanizing old, sick or ill-tempered horses.

We want to address these false concerns directly.

"Who will assume the cost of adoption for another 60,000 to 90,000 unwanted horses per year?" (July 2006)

"What about 125,000 unwanted horses? Who is going to care for them?" (September 2006)

– Charles W. Stenholm, Olsson, Frank and Weeda

"... how to address the 70,000 horses that will have to be taken care of..."

– Paxton Ramsey, National Cattlemen's Beef Association

"... which are simply incapable of taking on the responsibility for more than 70,000 unwanted horses every year."

– Frank S. Bowman, Horsemen's Council of Illinois

"H.R. 503 does not address the funding required to care for or dispose of an additional 80,000 horses per year."

– Douglas G. Corey, President-Elect, American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP)

"The legislation also does not address the disposal of more than 90,000 horse carcasses if horse slaughter is banned."

– Dr. Bonnie Beaver, Past President of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA)

"If H.R. 503 is passed, nearly 100,000 horses next year will need to be placed in alternative homes, or be euthanized and their carcass disposed of."

– Thomas P. Lenz, Past President, American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP)

THESE STATEMENTS NOT ONLY CONFLICT BUT ARE INACCURATE AND UNFOUNDED

- **Horse slaughter has been in dramatic decline for a decade with NO increase in "unwanted horses."** Over the last decade, 442,000 fewer horses were slaughtered – and were absorbed by the horse community and either found new homes or were euthanized.
- **The notion that H.R. 503 is going to precipitate some huge crisis belies the experience of the past 15 years.** The number of horses slaughtered has fallen dramatically and no corresponding increase in horse abandonment or neglect. When California banned horse slaughter in 1998, there was no increase in neglect or abuse cases, but there was a 34% drop in horse theft. This makes sense because the USDA reports that more than 92% of horses that are slaughtered are in "good condition" so could easily have led productive lives in new homes if killer buyers had not outbid others at horse auctions.

- **We have more horses than ever in the United States, with no increase in “unwanted horses.”** Even as the overall horse population has risen from below 7 million horses to more than 9 million over the past decade, the number of “unwanted horses” has been declining dramatically (both in absolute and relative terms). In 1995, approximately 150,000 horses were slaughtered – roughly 2.2% of the total US horse population. In 2004, the number of horses slaughtered had fallen by a third while the horse population had risen by a third – leading slaughter rates to fall in half – to 1.1% of the US horse population.
- **Even using their own numbers, AVMA, AAEP and other horse slaughter advocates’ analysis falls apart.**¹ In a table included with Beaver’s testimony entitled “Horse Welfare Coalition, Fiscal Impact of Horse Processing Facility Closures,” the number of “unwanted horses” is estimated at **25,200 per year.**² It is not 60,000, 70,000, 80,000, 90,000, or 100,000 – which are the numbers horse slaughter advocates provided in Congressional testimony over a two day period of hearings in July – and those estimates appear to rise daily as we approach the vote now. And this much smaller number than the one thrown about carelessly today is based on the assumption that every horse sent to slaughter would become “unwanted,” which simply isn’t true. More than 92% of them are in perfectly good condition, according to the USDA, and would find useful lives in new homes.
- **For a decade, the decline in horse slaughter has been consistent, with no increase in “unwanted horses.”** Over the past ten years, an average of nearly 45,000 fewer horses have gone to slaughter each year – which is more than twice the number H.R. 503 opponents now estimate will be in need of rescue/adoption annually. There are no horses wandering our streets, despite these declines in horses slaughtered.
- **Slaughter is obviously not an outlet for “unwanted horses” since we are importing horses to slaughter them.** If slaughter advocates are so certain that slaughter provides an answer to the “unwanted horse” problem in America, perhaps we should ask why nearly four percent of horses slaughtered between January and July of this year were *imported* from Canada. Of the nearly 70,000 horses slaughtered in the US through July 2006, 2,534 were imported from Canada (of whom 2,238 were slaughtered in Illinois and 296 were slaughtered in Texas).³ This is no aberration – in 2005, 7,095 live horses were imported from Canada bound for American slaughter plants, or 7.5 percent of the 94,037 horses slaughtered here.⁴ If horse slaughter was actually an answer or in any way connected to an “unwanted horse” problem, then we would not be importing horses from Canada for slaughter.

“The horses arriving at horse slaughter plants are the unwanted of the unwanted.”

– Dick Koehler, Vice President, BelTex Corporation

¹ Pro-slaughter witnesses appearing before the House Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade, and Consumer Protection, Committee on Energy and Commerce on July 25, 2006 proposed very different estimates of horses they assert will be “unwanted.”

² In the calculation compiled by AQHA, AVMA and AAEP, they start with an assumption that 70,000 (not 90,000) horses will be unwanted every year. They then assume that 60 percent will be disposed of “alternately” (sic). This reduces the number of horses “to be boarded per year” to 28,000. Then, they assume an additional 10 percent will succumb to death or be euthanized, leaving 25,200 horses each year requiring rescue/adoption.

³ USDA APHIS, “Canadian Live Animal Imports into the US by Destination,” weekly reports listed at http://www.ams.usda.gov/mnreports/WA_LS637.txt; and USDA NASS, “Equine Slaughter” data series, query conducted at <http://www.nass.usda.gov:8080/QuickStats/index2.jsp>.

⁴ *Ibid.* In 2005, 6,144 Canadian horses were slaughtered in Illinois and 951 were slaughtered in Texas.

"Unfortunately, each year a small percentage of horses are ultimately unwanted because they are no longer serviceable, are infirm, dangerous, or their owners are no longer able to care for them."

- Representative Bob Goodlatte

USDA STATISTICS -- AND COMMON SENSE -- UNDERMINE THESE STATEMENTS

- **According to the USDA's own "Guidelines for Handling and Transporting Equines to Slaughter," 92.3 percent of horses arriving at slaughter plants are in "good" condition.** Among those "good" horses are horses who have been stolen from their rightful owners or else sold/adopted to killer buyers under false pretenses. That means that no more than 8% are ill, injured, or otherwise unable to be used productively. At most, there are some 7,280 horses that would need to be humanely euthanized and spared the horror and suffering of slaughter – a relatively small and manageable number.
- **Owner ignorance, the economy, and the weather are the causes of neglect – not access to slaughter.** Because the number of horses being slaughtered annually represents only one percent of the horse population, their fate has little – if any - effect on horse welfare overall. Neglect is likely more dependent upon factors such as weather (forage and hay availability) and the state of the economy than any other factor.

It is absurd for the horse slaughter plants to attempt to claim that they represent the best interests of the horses, rather than The Humane Society of the United States. Don't let the horse slaughter industry co-opt your humane vote. VOTE YES ON H.R. 503!

This will be a scored vote on the 2006 Humane Scorecard.