

American Humane Association ♦ American Horse Defense Fund ♦ American Mustang and Burro Association, Inc. ♦ American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals ♦ American Wild Horse Preservation Campaign ♦ Doris Day Animal League ♦ Fund for Animals ♦ Humane Society of the United States ♦ International Society for the Protection of Mustangs and Burros ♦ Least Resistance Training Concepts, Inc. ♦ Return to Freedom ♦ Society for Animal Protective Legislation ♦ Vaquero Heritage Foundation ♦ Wild Horse and Burro Coalition ♦ Wild Horse and Burro Freedom Alliance ♦ Wild Horse Observers Association

May 22, 2006

Dear Representative:

You may have received a letter from a group identifying itself as the “Farm Animal Welfare Coalition” (an unofficial alliance of industry organizations that benefit from the slaughter of horses) or the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) attempting to muddle the question of humane treatment for horses. **We would like to set the record straight.**

**The humane community strongly supports the Sweeney-Spratt-Whitfield-Rahall Horse Slaughter Amendment to the Agriculture Appropriations bill. No one is more concerned for the long-term well-being and humane treatment of horses than the community of animal welfare and humane organizations working to support the Sweeney-Spratt-Whitfield-Rahall Amendment.** Collectively, we represent more than **10 million supporters nationwide**, united strongly in favor of this amendment to bar the use of tax dollars to facilitate the export-driven horse slaughter industry via USDA inspection and approval of horsemeat and horses for slaughter. **This amendment will reduce suffering experienced by horses and put an end to slaughter practices that most Americans abhor.** The amendment had strong bipartisan support, as demonstrated by the landslide House vote, animal and horse welfare organizations, the horse racing industry, the horse show industry, and others who rely on and love horses, such as leaders of the Professional Bull Riders Association.

The House of Representatives supported a similar amendment last year by a vote of 269-158, which clearly ended the slaughter of horses for FY06; sadly the US Department of Agriculture blatantly ignored the will of Congress and American people by disregarding the law.

The amendment this year has been further refined to leave no doubt in the mind of the USDA that Congress intends ALL horse slaughter to stop.

Opponents of the amendment are trying to confuse the issue by the extraordinary and untenable argument that the slaughter industry somehow benefits horses. **Here are the facts:**

**Myth:** This amendment could result in “unregulated shipment of horses to slaughter” and horses being shipped longer distances to slaughter.

**Fact: Untrue.** Without USDA inspectors, American horses will not be allowed to be shipped to slaughter. The Ensign-Byrd Amendment will terminate any legal option for sending American horses to slaughter – within the United States at one of the three, foreign-owned plants or to any foreign slaughterhouse. The USDA role in approving horsemeat or live horse shipment for slaughter is required by law so the Ensign-Byrd Amendment is a perfect mechanism for halting that process entirely.

**Myth:** There has been an increase in the number of abandoned and unwanted horses in the U.S., and passage of the Ensign-Byrd amendment will lead to an increase in horse abuse and starvation or neglect cases.

**Fact:** There is no evidence to support these claims. According to the USDA, at least 5000 horses have been IMPORTED into one of the three foreign-owned slaughter plants in the U.S. for slaughter since August 2004. If there were “too many” horses in the U.S., then there would be no reason to import horses for slaughter. Furthermore, a ban on horse slaughter will not lead to an increase in horse abuse and neglect. In California, where horse slaughter was banned in 1998, there has been no corresponding rise in cruelty and neglect cases. In fact, horse theft has dropped by 34% since enactment of the ban. Allowing one’s horse to starve is not an option – state anti-cruelty laws prohibit such neglect.

**Myth:** Transport guidelines protect horses shipped to slaughter from harm.

**Fact:** The 2002 guidelines allow horses to be shipped for more than 24 hours without food, water or rest, with broken limbs, with eyes missing, even heavily pregnant. Industry pushed to delay the prohibition on use of double-decker trucks until December 7, 2006. The regulations only cover the final journey to the slaughterhouse. If horses are loaded and unloaded at various places as part of their route to slaughter, only the final leg of the trip is covered. Enforcement of these guidelines will only occur once the truck reaches the slaughter plant, so these guidelines will have little preventative effect. These guidelines are wholly inadequate and allow extreme suffering in transport to continue.

**Myth:** There is no need for the Ensign-Byrd amendment because slaughter is humane euthanasia.

**Fact:** Horse slaughter is a far cry from humane euthanasia. “Euthanasia” means a gentle, painless death provided in order to prevent suffering. Horse slaughter is a death fraught with terror, pain, and suffering. Horses are shipped for more than 24 hours at a time in crowded double-deck cattle trucks without food, water, or rest. Pregnant mares, foals, injured horses, and even blind horses must endure the journey. Once they arrive, their suffering intensifies – undercover footage demonstrates that fully conscious horses are shackled and hoisted by the rear leg and have their throats slit. Because horses are skittish by nature, it is particularly difficult to align them correctly and ensure the captive bolt stun gun renders them unconscious. Unwanted horses should be humanely euthanized by a licensed veterinarian when no other option exists, rather than placed on a truck, cruelly transported, and then butchered. Most horse owners already use humane euthanasia for their older or ill horses.

**Myth:** If horses can no longer be slaughtered, their welfare is at risk due to the lack of adequate equine rescue facilities and uniform standards for them.

**Fact:** Standards of care have already been developed and embraced by the hundreds of equine rescue and retirement facilities that exist throughout the country that routinely rescue horses from slaughter. All must comply with state and local animal welfare statutes. In an effort to end the slaughter of racehorses, the New York Racing Association has partnered with other groups to launch the “Ferdinand Fee” to raise funds for the care of retired racehorses, and to honor

Ferdinand, a former Kentucky Derby winner who went to slaughter. **The organizations leading the charge in favor of the Ensign-Byrd Amendment are the very organizations that are actively working to provide sanctuaries and solutions for any horses that would otherwise go to slaughter.**

**Myth:** If the Ensign-Byrd amendment is passed, the federal government will face the financial burden of care for horses no longer going to slaughter.

**Fact:** This assertion rests on the false premise that all horses currently going to slaughter would become the financial responsibility of the federal government. Horse owners, not the government, will remain responsible for the care of their horses. Owners who no longer wish to keep their horses and who cannot sell or place their horses in a new home will have the option of humane euthanasia. The average cost for veterinarian-administered euthanasia and carcass disposal – approximately \$225, the cost of one month's care – is simply a part of responsible horse ownership.

**Myth:** Ending horse slaughter will cause environmental harm.

**Fact:** Hundreds of thousands of horses are safely disposed of annually by means other than slaughter, and the infrastructure can absorb an increase in numbers. Conversely, the operation of the horse slaughterhouses has a very real negative environmental impact, with two out of the three in violation of current environmental law related to the disposal of blood and other waste materials. Mayor Paula Beacon of Kaufman, TX – the home of one of the three horse slaughter plants in the U.S. – desperately states "...Dallas-Crown is operating in violation of a multitude of local laws pertaining to waste management, air quality and other environmental concerns... Residents are also fed up with the situation. Long-established neighbors living adjacent to the plant cannot open their windows or run air conditioners without enduring the most horrific stench."

**Myth:** A prohibition on horse slaughter creates a negative precedent for beef, pork and poultry producers by legitimizing efforts to end consumption of food derived from any animal.

**Fact:** Americans don't eat horses, and unlike other livestock, we don't breed them for human consumption. Additionally, horses are different from cattle (and other animals specifically bred, sold, and transported for human consumption) due to their instinctive flight response in stressful conditions, making it difficult to accurately stun them prior to slaughter. Undercover footage has demonstrated that many horses are dismembered while fully conscious, underscoring the need to ban this utterly inhumane process. The American public overwhelmingly supports a ban on horse slaughter- horses have a special place in our heritage and they are beloved companions to millions today.

**Myth:** Consuming horsemeat does not put the public's health at risk.

**Fact:** Horsemeat is potentially dangerous to humans when eaten because horses are not raised for this purpose. Recent lab work revealed that horsemeat from one of the Texas plants contains several substances that are not intended for human consumption. Our horses are regularly treated

with worming medications, drugs and other injections that are not intended for human consumption.

**Myth:** There has been no formal public discussion on this issue.

**Fact:** For years, legislation that would prohibit horse slaughter has been under consideration in the Senate. The U.S. House of Representatives witnessed thoughtful and substantial public floor debate on this identical amendment which led to its passage by a landslide bipartisan vote. Further, there has been extensive media coverage on this issue by newspapers and television networks nationwide including CNN, The L.A. Times, The Washington Post, USA Today, and many others. Action on this issue is past due and the Ensign-Byrd Amendment is a perfect opportunity to halt this extremely controversial and tax-supported practice.

Passage of this amendment will end the suffering of nearly 100,000 of America's horses in a single year, and will be good for animal welfare. The humane community supports an end to the slaughter of our horses, as does the American public. Please **support** the Sweeney-Spratt-Whitfield-Rahall amendment to the Agriculture Appropriations bill.

Thank you for your consideration.

**For more information please contact:**

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