



Fallacy-based SAFE Act Threatens Horse Industry, Equine Welfare

Horse Industry Under Attack; True Equine Welfare at Stake

The horse industry is under attack as never before, on numerous levels. At Western Justice, we are dedicated to taking the proverbial bull by the horns, and facing these challenges head-on. Why? We do this because we believe in truth, and the forces attacking the horse industry—and all animal enterprises—are built upon a foundation of lies.

By deliberately misleading a well-meaning but largely unaware general public, and then in turn, lawmakers, animal extremist groups fundraise and target particular equine events and practices through various levels of legislation at the local, state, and federal levels.

Since 2013, an immense overlying threat to the entire horse industry—and ironically, actual equine welfare—has been slowly simmering in the United States Congress. This threat is gaining increasing momentum. If passed, the bill would ironically exacerbate what has proven to be an absolute animal—and environmental—welfare crisis. In addition, it would cause devastating repercussions throughout every aspect of the horse industry. The threat to equine welfare is called the SAFE Act.

The Safeguard American Food Exports (SAFE) Act is a deceptively named, animal extremist-backed bill that would completely outlaw horse processing plants in the United States as well as prohibit the shipping of horses from the USA to be humanely processed for consumption across our borders. Currently in the United States, processing of horses is NOT illegal. It simply has stopped because there is no budget for USDA equine inspectors. Because of this, the last domestic horse processing plants closed in 2007, thus forcing tens of thousands of unwanted horses to be shipped longer distances to Canada or Mexico each year.

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Introduced in every Congress since 2013, the SAFE Act has historically made little headway, usually dying in committee. However, this time the situation has changed. On February 4, 2019 the SAFE Act was again introduced to Congress as H.R.961, by Reps. Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) and Vern Buchanan (R-FL). On March 1, 2019, the bill was then referred to the Subcommittee on Livestock and Foreign Agriculture by the Committee on Agriculture. Currently, the bill has 228 co-sponsors, which is more than half of the House.

On the surface, the bill is based on the widely propagated falsehood that all American horse meat is unsafe for human consumption because of medications that could be administered to the animal. In truth, food safety is just a poorly conceived red herring to disguise the animal extremist agenda at the heart of the bill.

SAFE Act Based on Mistruths

It is extremely telling that the bill is backed by animal extremist groups such as HSUS and ASPCA, who routinely rely on fallacies and misguided emotion to fundraise and further their cause. Sadly, the SAFE Act is just one step toward the animal extremists' ultimate goal, which is to eliminate our ability to own, use, and enjoy horses and other animals. Those groups billing themselves as "horse advocacy" groups, who are also pushing for the SAFE Act's passing, simply do not realize that by aligning with animal extremists, they are, as the saying goes, in bed with the devil.

In the case of the SAFE Act, there are numerous inaccuracies, emotional ploys, and complete falsehoods in play.

FALSE: Horses are "brutally slaughtered" and cannot be humanely killed and processed for consumption.

First and foremost, the verbiage utilized (such as brutal, barbaric, slaughter, etc) by animal extremist groups is very intentionally designed to provoke emotion, because emotion leads to donations.

The truth is that the penetrating captive bolt gun utilized in modern equine processing plants is humane, according to major professional veterinary medical associations, the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) and the American Association of Equine Practitioners (AAEP). In fact, when utilized correctly, the penetrating captive bolt gun or a gunshot provide instantaneous unconsciousness and induce death more rapidly than chemical euthanasia.

In addition, it is important to note that numerous other large animal species, such as cattle, pigs, and sheep, and even exotics such as bison and elk, are regularly humanely processed for consumption. The assertion that horses somehow "can't" be humanely processed is entirely emotional.

Animal extremists and "horse advocacy" groups also ironically state that the long transport times to Canada or Mexico are inhumane. The facts are that those groups created the need for transporting horses long distances across the U.S. border by forcing the closure of domestic plants, via defunding the budget for USDA inspectors.

FALSE: Horses are strictly companion animals and should not be processed for consumption.

Decades of Hollywood's anthropomorphic portrayal of horses, in tandem with the US population becoming further and further removed from agrarian lifestyles, have led to an extreme disconnect between perception and reality regarding equines.

The assertion that horses are only a companion animal is incredibly narrow-minded and ethnocentric. Horses have been a food animal around the world for millennia. Today, horse meat is regularly consumed in China, Japan, Mexico, Belgium, Canada, Chile, Spain, Iceland, France, Russia, Kazakhstan, and many Eastern

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European, South American, Southeast, and Eastern Asian countries. The European Union alone requires 200,000 horses annually to meet demand.

Contrary to the animal extremist narrative, each and every American horse is NOT a pasture pet or beloved long-time companion. Horses were first officially categorized as livestock by the Humane Methods of Slaughter Act of 1958. This was reaffirmed by the 2018 Farm Bill, and horses are viewed as livestock by many horse owners.

Of course, as long as it's humane, each individual horse owner has the right to view and treat their animals according to their personal ideology and make management decisions accordingly including end of life options. For the owner to whom the horse is a pet, veterinary induced chemical euthanasia and subsequent cremation might be the choice. However, it is not acceptable for anyone to force other owners to use that option. No one has been, or ever will be, forced to have their horse processed for consumption, but the option *must* remain available.

It is important to understand that having a horse chemically euthanized by a veterinarian and paying for carcass disposal can be cost prohibitive. If a horse owner is no longer able to afford care for a horse, how are they expected to pay for euthanasia and disposal? Also, very few people have the ability to put a horse down themselves or have the space and equipment necessary to bury one on their own property.

It's also of note that chemical euthanasia creates toxic waste that must be disposed of properly. If 100,000 horses were chemically euthanized annually, assuming that horses average 1000 pounds, there would be 100,000,000 pounds of toxic waste introduced to the ecosystem *each year*.

FALSE: Wild horses are rounded up and sent to “slaughter.” We have to protect “our” American horses.

Laws prevent Bureau of Land Management (BLM) managed wild horses from being sent to be processed, hence the thousands of unadopted, unwanted mustangs housed in long term holding facilities for the duration of their lives at immense taxpayer expense. Currently the population of horses on American rangelands is over 4 times the appropriate level as mandated by the Wild Horse and Burro Act. This is causing great damage to the ecosystem and severely impacting the horses themselves as well as native wildlife. Tribal lands are also being overrun by thousands of feral horses that destroy wildlife habitat and decimate vegetation, including plants that are central to Native American traditions and religion. Rounding the excess feral horses up and sending them to be processed is the only realistic, feasible management option.

FALSE: 80% of Americans are against horse processing.

Animal extremists and their “horse advocacy” cohorts regularly state that 80% of Americans are against horse processing. The old saying that “a lie repeated often enough becomes truth” comes to mind when that statement is repeated by extremist groups. However, the actual total number and demographics of those polled to manufacture this data is never included. There are over 2 million horse owners in the United States and more than 7 million Americans are involved in the horse industry as owners, service providers, employees and volunteers—they have not been the ones polled. Another old saying rings true: “There are lies, damned lies, and statistics.”

FALSE: All horse meat is unsafe for human consumption because of medications administered to horses.

“Horse advocates” have gone all-in on the claim that all horse meat is unsafe due to drug residues in horse meat, hence the SAFE Act. A primary focus is the anti-inflammatory drug, phenylbutazone, commonly known as “bute.” Another is deworming medication.

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There are two glaring fallacies at play here.

First and foremost, not every horse is given “bute.” It is most commonly used in performance and working horses as part of a short-term treatment plan to alleviate pain and inflammation from strenuous activity. The truth is that the vast majority of American horses, such as feral horses on tribal lands, broodmares, young horses, untrained and light use horses, never need to “be buted.”

EVERY drug has a withdrawal period. Phenylbutazone is not inherently toxic to humans, and even IF a trace amount was present in consumed horse meat, there would be no effect. Professor Dame Sally Davies, a past United Kingdom Department of Health Chief Medical Officer, was quoted as saying: “Horsemeat containing phenylbutazone presents a very low risk to human health... Phenylbutazone, known as Bute, is a commonly used medicine in horses. It is also prescribed to some patients who are suffering from a severe form of arthritis... At the levels of Bute that have been found (in horsemeat), a person would have to eat 500 to 600 burgers a day that are 100% horse meat to get close to consuming a human’s daily dose. And it passes through the system quickly, so it is unlikely to build up in our bodies... In patients who have been taking phenylbutazone as a medicine there can be serious side effects, but these are rare. It is extremely unlikely that anyone who has eaten horse meat containing Bute will experience one of these side effects.”

The procedures of processing, shipping, and selling horse meat are subject to the same rigorous testing and safety protocols as all other meats. It is ridiculous to claim that such testing is somehow effective and safe for other meats, but not horse meat.

FALSE: Horse processing is not necessary; the rescue network can absorb the excess, horses can be rehomed or sold.

The closing of domestic plants in 2007, coupled with a recession, resulted in a steep increase in cases of neglect, abandonment, and abuse of horses, according to a 2011 report by the Government Accountability Office (GAO). This created what might be called a “perfect storm” situation, and a perfect opportunity for the animal extremist community to step up. It didn’t happen.

The groups against horse processing had very mistakenly maintained that equine rescues would absorb the excess horses after the closure of domestic plants. Instead, the existing rescue network was revealed to be woefully inadequate, with insufficient funding, shortage of physical space to board horses, and a glaring lack of real-world experience on the part of would-be “rescuers.”

A 2009 survey done by the Unwanted Horse Coalition showed that 39% of rescues were at maximum capacity and 30% were at near capacity. At the time, rescues were turning away 38% of horses brought to them. University of California-Davis researchers also found that 83.9% of rescue facilities surveyed received additional requests to accept horses between 2006-2009. It is important to reiterate that during this same time period when rescues were shown to be mostly full, an average of 100,000 horses per year were still being shipped abroad to be processed.

Rescues are not regulated. There is no guarantee that even when “rescued,” a horse will receive adequate care. In fact, numerous equine rescue operations have been shut down over the years due to inhumane conditions.

In the years since the last domestic horse processing plants closed their doors, an average of 110,000 horses have shipped—each year—to be processed in Mexico and Canada. If the SAFE Act passed, where would these tens of thousands of unwanted horses go each year? The “rescue” network grandstanded by animal extremists could not even accommodate the approximately 99,000 horses shipped abroad to be processed in 2008, much less in the years to follow.

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Even now, the HSUS website states that horse processing is unnecessary because horses could instead be “sold or rehomed.” The very same website paradoxically states that “kill buyers outbid rescuers,” implying that would-be rescuers are unable to buy one. Which is it? It can’t be both. A perfect example is when tribal horses are gathered and sold at auction, every single “horse advocate” out there has the opportunity to show up, bid, and take one or more home. But they don’t. Why is that?

FALSE: Overbreeding is the problem. If breeders reduce the number of horses they produce, there would be no unwanted horses.

It’s interesting to note that the years after 2007 saw a drastic decrease in numbers of horses registered with major breed associations; however, the total number of horses processed, even years after American horse processing plants were closed, has remained very close to the same as when domestic plants were in operation.

While the decrease in horses registered of course doesn’t account for numbers of grade (unregistered horses) produced, it is quite telling that even a dramatic reduction in overall numbers of a sample population has not, even in over a decade, resulted in a significant decrease of horses shipped to be processed.

Horses become unwanted for many reasons, from rampantly overpopulated feral horses on tribal lands to individual horses that are unsound, unsafe, unhealthy, or otherwise unfit for use. Also, changes in an owner’s living arrangements or financial circumstances very often lead to the decision to sell a horse. Modern technology has enabled communication and networking that would have once never been thought possible, allowing horse sellers to find horse buyers for every size, shape, and class of animal. Thus, it stands to reason that if a horse ends up in the auction barn, it’s for good reason.

Prior to domestic plants closing, approximately half of the total horses processed were quarter horses, which is logical since quarter horses make up the vast majority of America’s total equine population. Thoroughbreds comprised about 20%; draft horses 8%; and the remaining 20% were other breeds.

Looking at the Big Picture

This serves to show that, like it or not, processing is a necessary component in all aspects of the horse industry. Having the humane processing option in place takes nothing away from horse owners who choose other end of life options for their animals. Taking the option of processing away, however, would create an immediate, multi-faceted crisis of animal welfare, environmental welfare, and financial hardship. Meanwhile, the animal extremist movement would be advanced significantly.

Consider this, PETA founder Ingrid Newkirk infamously stated that “a rat is a pig is a dog is a boy.” Founders of plant-based meat substitute companies have plainly stated that their goal is to abolish the livestock industry. It is standard practice for animal extremists to target the “low hanging fruit” in their efforts to further their agenda. Thus, as Newkirk might put it, a horse is a pig is a cow is a boy—if we aren’t allowed to sell horses for consumption, it is safe to say that other meat animals are next on the list.

Western Justice does not shy away from the realities of this situation and stands firmly on the ground of true animal welfare based on sound, proven animal science, and the individual responsibilities and private property rights of livestock owners.

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