

Testimony by Russell C. Williams
Before the House Energy and Commerce Committee
Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection
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I am a fourth-generation participant in the Standardbred racing industry, from which I derive virtually my entire livelihood. Hanover Shoe Farms, in which I am an officer and part owner, is the world's largest breeder of Standardbreds, or trotters and pacers: we send nearly three hundred yearlings through the auction sales annually, from which they go into training to compete in races at thirty-nine major tracks in the New England and Mid-Atlantic States, Kentucky and the Midwest, Florida, and California. As this is written our horse population at the farm is 1,315, which includes 77 retired horses. These are mostly old broodmares who have outlived their breeding usefulness. They will be looked after until they die of natural causes or must be humanely euthanized.

Standardbreds have been part of this country's life for more than 200 years. They can be traced back to an English Thoroughbred named Messenger, imported to America in the 1790's, that sired a number of fast trotters. Brown Beauty, the horse that Paul Revere borrowed to make his famous midnight ride, was said to be a Narragansett Pacer. In addition to being the world's fastest horse in harness, the Standardbred excels in a variety of other equine disciplines.

It's a breed able to face every task with gentleness, patience, and endurance.

They are wonderful horses.

Though I wish to make clear that I am appearing as an active member of the horse industry and am not speaking for or representing any particular organization, I am also Vice Chairman and a trustee of the American Horse Council, Vice Chairman of the United States Trotting Association (the Standardbred breed's registry organization), and an advisory board member of the Standardbred Retirement Foundation. The Standardbred Retirement Foundation has arranged nearly 2,000 lifetime adoptions of non-competitive racehorses, transitioning some of them into new careers, and providing all of them with the care and dignity they deserve.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for conducting this hearing on H.R. 503, the Horse Slaughter Prevention Act. Commercial horse slaughter is a dark and ugly secret in the United States and, in my opinion, a serious threat to the horse industry itself. In essence, horse racing is a form of entertainment; consequently we depend on public perception. We compete, nowadays, with many other forms of entertainment, and we work constantly to maintain high standards of quality and integrity so that we may continue to earn our customers' loyalty. If horse racing has an edge over any other type of entertainment, it is the mystique that surrounds the horse itself. In a race, horses can display a unique distillation

of beauty, power, speed, and above all courage, which enables an individual to defeat all expectations and prevail by sheer force of will. Public awareness that we subject this noble animal to the needless suffering that goes with commercial horse slaughter could turn our customers against the sport of horse racing.

Commercial horse slaughter is not humanely carried out. I have seen continuing violations of state and federal transportation regulations where horses are being shipped to slaughter from the livestock sales. These violations continue because enforcement is extremely difficult. The protective regulations were promulgated in the first place because of the deplorable conditions under which horses were being loaded and sent on the long ride to slaughter, and in my opinion regulation will never be very effective. This problem also exists at the sales themselves, where pregnant mares, stallions, elderly, debilitated, blind, and injured horses are jumbled together and sold in an atmosphere that makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to sort out individuals that should be euthanized on the spot.

A logical argument can be made that ending slaughter would put some huge number of additional horses at risk of neglect by their owners, and thus of needless suffering. This argument only has force, however, if you assume that slaughter is humanely carried out, which it is not. Such an argument does not

mean that slaughter is part of any humane solution to the problem of unwanted horses; it means only that slaughter is a more acceptable evil than the alternative.

Congress need not accept the evil of slaughter. By ending slaughter, which is the only aspect of this problem now within legislative control, Congress will not only stop the needless suffering that accompanies slaughter, but also cause people like me, members of the horse industry itself, to move faster and work harder to put our own house in order. We breed them, we race them or show them, we enjoy and profit from them, and it ought to be our responsibility to look after them properly to the end of their lives. I submit that we must eliminate horse slaughter in order to retain the confidence of the public.

I am familiar with growing, industry-wide efforts in the Standardbred, Thoroughbred, and Quarter Horse fields to provide for horses that are past their usefulness. An Unwanted Horse Task Force has been set up at the American Horse Council within the past three months that will coordinate these efforts within the breeds so that unwanted horses can cease to be a national problem. To be frank, if the horse industry is deprived of the ability to discard and forget about a horse by sending it on that long trailer ride to slaughter, we will act far more efficiently to solve the problem by more appropriate means. Horses will cease to be disposable.

Passage of H.R. 503 will enable Congress to accomplish two very laudable effects in our country: to stimulate the horse industry to look after its own interest more responsibly and efficiently, and to put an end to a known source of suffering imposed on what is, for so many Americans, a beloved animal.

Thank you.

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