

Legislative Issues

House Passes Right-to-Ride Legislation

Press Release

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On May 16, the House of Representatives passed Congressman George Radanovich's "Right-to-Ride" bill (H.R. 586). The bill is intended to protect the use and access of pack and saddle stock animals on public lands, wilderness areas, national monuments, and other areas that are administered by the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, or the Forest Service where there is a historical tradition of such use.

"Congressman Radanovich has been a great champion of preserving recreational riders' access to public lands," said AHC President Jay Hickey. "We appreciate his steadfastness in introducing this legislation and pushing it through the House."

The legislation would require that federal agencies manage the public lands to preserve and facilitate the traditional and continued use and access of horses to these areas. The legislation provides that "as a general rule, all trails, routes, and areas used by pack and saddle stock shall remain open and accessible for such use."

During the House debate, Congressman Radanovich stated that "perhaps no other activity is more synonymous with the exploration of our vast open lands than that of the use of pack and saddle stock. Who could forget those images of President Teddy Roosevelt and John Muir on horseback at what was to become the Grand Canyon and Yosemite National Parks?"

In response to the argument that this bill singles out pack and saddle use and affords it greater consideration than other forms of recreation or commercial use, Mr. Radanovich argued that "pack and saddle use has played a far greater historic role on our public lands, particularly in our western states, than simply recreation. What may be perceived by some today as recreation was once a vital part of everyday living throughout our Nation's history."

The American Horse Council supports this legislation. "Many individuals who enjoy recreational riding on public lands have experienced frustration over the reduction of trails and the closure of public lands to horses. To prevent further closures, recreational riders are working closely with their local land managers and also looking for legislative solutions. We appreciate Congressman Radanovich's taking such an active role in this effort," said AHC President Jay Hickey.

Recreational riders must turn their attention to supporting the Senate bill (S. 781), which has been introduced by Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID).

American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act

American Horse Council Memorandum – July 29, 2006

The American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act (H.R. 503) was the focus of a flurry of activity this week in the House of Representatives. By week's end, the bill had been discharged or reported out of two House Committees. It is expected that the bill will be considered by the House of Representatives after the August-Labor Day Recess, probably during the first week of September.

The Bill

This bill was introduced in February 2005 by Congressmen John Sweeney (R-NY) and Ed Whitfield (R-KY). It would prohibit the slaughter of horses for human consumption. The bill would amend the Horse Protection Act (HPA). The Animal & Plant Inspection Service (APHIS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture enforces the HPA. Specifically, the bill would amend the HPA to prohibit the shipping, transporting, or sale of horses for slaughter and subject violators to penalties of up to \$3,000 and/or one year in jail for the first offense and up to \$5,000 and/or two years in jail for a second offense. An offender may also be subject to civil penalties of \$2,000 for each violation. The bill calls for \$5 million for enforcement.

Hearings

Two days of hearings were held on the bill. These were the first Congressional hearings ever held on the issue of slaughtering horses for human consumption. A hearing was held before the Subcommittee on Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection of the Energy and Commerce Committee on Tuesday and a hearing was held before the House Agriculture Committee on Thursday. A total of thirteen witnesses appeared before both Committees, both supporting and opposing the bill.

Proponents of the legislation argued that horses are different than other animals and should not be slaughtered for food, that the transport and slaughter process are inhumane, that many horses are stolen and that many sellers don't know their horses may be sent to the processing facilities.

Opponents raised concerns about what would happen to the tens of thousands of horses slaughtered now, who would care for them and provide funding for their care, and the interference by the government with personal decisions like this about personal property.

The hearings drew a lot of interest and highlighted the strong feelings surrounding this issue, particularly within the horse industry itself as horse owners and horse organizations testified both in support and in opposition to the bill.

Committee Actions

Both Committees have now released the bill so that it is ready for action by the full House.

Representative Joe Barton (R-TX), Chairman of the Energy and Commerce Committee, discharged the bill himself without any recommendation or action by the Committee, an unusual step, but within his discretion as Chairman. Mr. Barton indicated his opposition to the bill but during the hearing other members of the Committee voiced support.

The House Agriculture Committee considered the bill and amended it. Representative Bob Goodlatte (R-VA) opposed the bill and most of the members of the Committee also expressed opposition. This was reflected in the amendments the Committee adopted during its consideration.

The Agriculture Committee amendments to the bill, all adopted by voice vote, would:

- Limit the application of the bill to Kentucky and New York, the states of the principal proponents (offered by Representative Colin Peterson (D-MN);
- Require the Secretary of Agriculture to assume responsibility for all unwanted horses (offered by Representative Ken Salazar (D-CO);
- Require the Secretary of Agriculture to compensate any horse owner for the loss of value and costs incurred in euthanizing and disposing of the horse since he would no longer have the option of selling the horse for processing (offered by Representative Mike Conaway (R-TX); and
- Three amendments offered by Representative Steven King (R-IA) requiring the USDA to reimburse state and local governments for the costs incurred in caring for stray or abandoned horses and the sale, adoption, euthanizing or disposal of such horses; exempting horses processed for charitable or humanitarian purposes; and excluding from the prohibitions any processing plant in existence on the date of enactment.

After considering the amendments, the Committee voted to report the bill to the House "unfavorably...with a recommendation that it not be agreed to."

Next Steps

The two bills will now go to the House Rules Committee, which will set the ground rules for consideration by the House. The Rules Committee may limit debate to either the bill as originally introduced, to the bill as amended by the Agriculture Committee or try to combine the two different bills into one. The Rules Committee will also decide whether amendments will be allowed to be offered, how many, and how long debate will be.

Please contact the AHC with any questions.
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