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The Tipping Point

“ IT is not the critic that counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done better. The credit belongs to the man that is actually in the arena.”

Theodore Roosevelt

1858-1919



Where
Do We
Go
From
Here?

The Last of the News 2

It's a short issue.
Here are the
December highlights.

In April 2013, when Tipping Point first appeared in your in-box, the drive to find sufficient support in the House and the Senate to pass the PAST Act was starting its upward climb. By December of 2014, thanks to the efforts of people all across the country who were supported, informed, and assisted by the AAEP, the AVMA, the ASPCA, and the HSUS, the PAST Act broke the Hastert Rule with 308 bi-partisan co-sponsors and was filibuster proof in the Senate with 60 co-sponsors; **it was a magnificent effort**. Yet, this anti-crime, humane legislation never reached the floor of either side of Congress and the effort to amend the existing federal Horse Protection Act died with the last day of the lame duck session. There has been much speculation since the last quack was heard about behind-the-scenes activity concerning the more prominent actors in this drama and how they supposedly failed the rest of us and by extension the horse.

The failure to pass PAST was not the failure of any single person or organization. It was an intentional and collective failure of elected officials. PAST failed because of the willful obstruction of Tennessee and Kentucky politicians. Yet, recent speculation about whose fault this failure was seems to prefer eating our own, to pitch its tone around personalities, casting doubt on organizations and people who deserve better. Before picking up stones to throw in blame ask if the finger-pointing approach helps reach what is still our long-term goal, the end of soring and the amendment of the HPA. The only important thing to ask of our side is: “Will the mistakes or missed opportunities of 2014 be corrected going forward?”

The sound horse movement has always had within it people with more ego than they need and more camps than it can support. We've had people in our ranks for years who have specialized in disruptive behavior, playing people and groups against each other, simply because they enjoy the insider status game. In the past, there has been a predictable tendency by our anti-soring, humane treatment and training contingent to become distracted and discouraged just when focus and the ability to put aside personalities and concentrate only on the issues at hand are most needed. We also seem to have a persistent naiveté about how the real game is played and paid at the federal level and a failure to fully appreciate that a 50 year tradition of abuse in the training and exhibition of the walking horse is going to be defended with big money, well placed lobbyists, and by pulling in every marker that has been collected from politicians who have been given campaign funds as insurance money against the day that people on our side might finally got organized enough to be a force with which to be reckoned. So, our first national effort to change the horse world failed. Get over it. We're still here and **the fact that we came so close has scared the bejeezus out the industry and the breed registry. Let's remember that in the closing hours of 2014. Where do we go from here? We go back to work, smarter and more experienced, in 2015!**

Tennessean Says Horse Soring Editorial was the 3rd Most Read Editorial of 2014 year

dplazas@tennessean.com 4:56 p.m. CST December 30, 2014

Politics dominated The Tennessean's most-read editorials of 2014.

No surprise, given the mid-term election and the contentious battle involving constitutional amendments related to abortion, high court judicial selection, taxes and the Lottery. Other top-consumed issues included TennCare's leadership and protecting the competitors in the Walking Horse Celebration.

Santa Claus also made the Top 10 list by our publication of a classic editorial on Christmas Eve (online) and Christmas Day (in print).

The Tennessean developed this list by tracking the number of page views each editorial received on both desktop and mobile platforms, using the Adobe Site Catalyst metrics tracking website Omniture. Each page view represents a person loading the page and reading some or all of the article.

Without further ado, let's start the backwards count of Top 10 with an excerpt from each and a link to the whole article:

3. Demanded that competitive horses be protected from abuse and "soring" (Aug. 19)

"The 76th Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration opens Wednesday in Shelbyville, and the entire equine industry, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Congress will be watching. If past competitions are any indication, that scrutiny is a good thing.

"With as many as 2,000 horses competing over 11 days, USDA inspectors will be put to the test as they try to determine whether horses have been subjected to abuse by soring in order to achieve a prized, high-stepping gait.

"As in any sport where the stakes are high, owners or managers will sometimes seek to gain an unfair advantage with the use of performance-enhancing substances.

Walking Horse competitions differ from other sports in that the percentage of competitors — owners and trainers — who cheat is so very high, and that the "athletes" are animals who have no say over what is being done to them."

N.B. Walking Horse News was not among the high ranking stories for end of the year in Shelbyville's Times-Gazette. The construction of a new library and the induction of the new Bedford County sheriff were the stories that most captured the attention of local readers and the newsroom.

It is apparent, however, that the interest in changing the practices and the atmosphere found in walking horse shows statewide remains of interest in the broader middle Tennessee area. That's good news for sound horse advocates.

Wheelon Assistant Trainer's Case Will be Referred to the Blount County Grand Jury

Randall Stacey Gunter, an assistant trainer for Larry Wheelon of Marysville, Tennessee, has, after a thorough hearing of the evidence in his case by a local judge been bound over for a further hearing before the grand jury to see if he should be indicted for felony horse abuse in the case of horses seized over a year ago in a raid on Larry Wheelon's training facility.

The other assistant trainer in the case, Brandon Lunsford, had also been awaiting evidentiary proceedings, but was killed at the time of the Thanksgiving holiday when he was ejected from a truck in which he was a passenger. The driver lost control of the truck in the one vehicle accident.

The judge found that the third defendant, blacksmith Blake Primm, should not be referred to the grand jury because the judge felt that the evidence against him of pressure shoeing horses was insufficient. The fact that the USDA investigator allowed hardened hoof packing to be put back in a horse's foot and the package reapplied after having the shoe pulled appeared to play a significant part in that decision.

Publisher David Howard Comes to an Interesting Conclusion after TWHBEA Election

With the passage of the by-law amendments that essentially stripped all but Southern states of the directors that represent members as well as the election to the executive committee of senior citizens and radical performance horse supporters, David Howard of The Walking Horse Report cited ballot return statistics to assert that the members had spoken and were in favor of the Steve Smith regime which will now be seconded by old faithful, Charles Gleghorn.

High returns from southern states and low returns from everywhere else were a message according to Mr. Howard that the membership approved of TWHBEA's direction. He might have considered that the low returns were the final indication that members outside the pro-performance southern states have finally seen the light at the end of the tunnel and recognize it as a train. Those members didn't bother to vote because they no longer believe that TWHBEA is part of the solution but is in fact a significant part of the problem.

Shortly after the annual meeting Executive Director Tracy Boyd announced that a wonderful new opportunity had come his way and he was resigning from his position. Not having to ride that fence is going to feel much better for Mr. Boyd in his new job.