



**THE HUMANE SOCIETY  
OF THE UNITED STATES**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**The Humane Society of the United States Applauds Strong  
Enforcement Action by U.S. Attorney's Office and U.S. Department of  
Agriculture Under Horse Protection Act**

(Oct. 20, 2011) -- One of four Tennessee residents indicted for violations of the federal Horse Protection Act and related financial crimes has pleaded guilty to conspiracy to violate the Act. Paul Blackburn, 35, of Shelbyville, Tenn., faces a term of up to one year in prison and a \$3,000 fine for his involvement in a horse training operation that engaged in the cruel and illegal practice known as "soring." Metal bolts were inserted in horses' hooves, chemicals were injected and irritants were applied to sensitive areas of the horses' feet and ankles to exaggerate their high-stepping gait for horse exhibitions. Sentencing is set for Jan. 23, 2012 at 9 a.m. in U.S. District Court in Chattanooga, Tenn.

The successful investigation and indictment under the federal law results from a joint effort by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Office of Inspector General, which led the investigation, and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of Tenn. in Knoxville. Their efforts have earned high praise from The Humane Society of the United States for their work in bringing criminal horse abusers to justice and sending a zero-tolerance message to violators of the HPA.

"The Humane Society of the United States is encouraged to see that justice was sought and that violators will pay for their crimes against horses," said Keith Dane, director of equine protection for The HSUS. "This outcome sends a clear message to anyone who illegally sores a gaited show horse that the federal government takes violations of the Horse Protection Act seriously."

The HSUS is fighting the cruel practice of horse soring – the crime at the heart of the indictments – on a number of fronts. The HSUS filed a legal petition with the USDA in August 2010 to strengthen enforcement of the HPA, and is urging Congress to allocate more funds to USDA to improve enforcement on the ground. The appropriation for HPA enforcement has been stuck at no more than \$500,000 since the passage of a 1976 amendment to the Act, and has not been increased in nearly four decades.

Soring is the unlawful practice where items like metal bolts are driven into horses' hooves or caustic chemicals are applied to produce severe pain and sensitivity to alter the horse's gait. Because of the pain, horses raise their front legs immediately after touching the ground, producing the exaggerated gait rewarded in show rings of the Tennessee Walking Horse and

other gaited breeds. Sored horses often live in constant and extreme pain throughout their show ring careers.

### **Background:**

- In April, a federal grand jury returned a 34-count indictment against Blackburn, as well as Barney Davis, 38, and Jeffery Bradford, 33, of Lewisburg, Tenn., and Christen Altman, 25, of Shelbyville, Tenn., charging them with violations of the federal Horse Protection Act and related financial crimes. The three remaining defendants involved in the alleged horse soring conspiracy have announced their intention to plead guilty to federal charges next month. Hearings for Davis, Altman and Bradford are scheduled in U.S. District Court, Chattanooga, on Nov. 8. Assistant U.S. Attorneys Steven Neff and Kent Anderson represent the United States.
- Davis was taken into custody by U.S. Marshals in late July for violating the conditions of his pre-trial bond forbidding him from training horses. According to his attorney, Davis apparently violated his bond when video footage surfaced showing Davis attaching a metal plate with a metal bolt to a horse's foot. Davis remains incarcerated pending further action by the court.
- Congress enacted the [Horse Protection Act](#) in 1970, making it a federal offense to show, sell, auction, exhibit or transport a sored horse. However, alleged violators of the Horse Protection Act are rarely indicted on charges or even penalized. The USDA needs additional funding in order to carry out its mission of enforcement, as mandated by the Horse Protection Act. An increase in the agency's FY 2012 budget was requested by the Administration and a bipartisan group of over 150 members of Congress, but was not included in the House-passed bill. The Senate included an increase for HPA enforcement in its version of the FY12 spending bill; the disparate bills must be resolved before a final USDA budget is enacted.

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*The Humane Society of the United States is the nation's largest animal protection organization — backed by 11 million Americans, or one of every 28. For more than a half-century, The HSUS has been fighting for the protection of all animals through advocacy, education and hands-on programs. Celebrating animals and confronting cruelty — On the Web at [humanesociety.org](http://humanesociety.org).*

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