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The Humane Society of the United States promotes humane future for breed through awards, legislation

FRANKLIN, Tenn. (Aug. 29, 2013)— With an eye toward a sound and versatile future for competitive Tennessee walking horses, The Humane Society of the United States announced the [“Now That’s a Walking Horse!”](#) grant and recognition program. The HSUS and Marty Irby, immediate past president of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association, also called on Congress to pass the [Prevent All Soring Tactics \(PAST\) Act](#), H.R. 1518/S.1406, to strengthen the existing federal law to end soring.

These announcements were made at a press conference during the final days of the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration. The award program and support for the bill are part of The HSUS’ ongoing commitment to end the practice of horse “soring,” which is the deliberate infliction of pain to Tennessee walking horses’ legs and hooves to force them to perform an artificially high-stepping gait that is rewarded at the Celebration.

Individual awards up to \$500 and program grants up to \$1,000 are available to those who promote flat-shod registered Tennessee walking horses in venues other than traditional show ring rail classes. The program encourages improvement of horses’ and riders’ skills, recognizes participation and achievement in multi-breed events, and enables equipment purchases and rider sponsorships in therapeutic horsemanship programs and natural horsemanship clinics intended to introduce more walking horse enthusiasts to humane approaches to training. Applicants for these grants must have no history of Horse Protection Act violations received from the U.S. Department of Agriculture or any of its certified horse industry inspection programs within the past five years in order to participate in this program.

“We believe the Tennessee walking horse industry can realize a sound future by recognizing some of its new leaders: owners and riders who appreciate the versatility, temperament and athleticism of this magnificent breed,” said Keith Dane, director of equine protection for The HSUS. “The PAST Act will be an integral part of this sound revolution—when every aspect of soring abuse is eradicated by this important federal legislation, the horses and their caring owners will truly be able to shine.”

“I fully support the PAST Act and believe that our United States Senators and Congressmen can virtually eliminate the cruel practice of soring and utilizing pads and chains, which is nothing short of slavery, by passing this amendment,” said Irby. “To compromise would not free the

Tennessee walking horse from this bondage forever. I stand firm and strong in my conviction, and I believe this is what it will take for the Tennessee walking horse to become the largest equine breed on Earth.”

Although the federal Horse Protection Act was enacted in 1970, it has been difficult to enforce and persistently flouted by a small but determined faction of the horse industry—and as a result, soring has continued unabated. The [PAST Act](#), sponsored in the House of Representatives by Reps. Ed Whitfield, R-Ky., and Steve Cohen, D-Tenn. and in the Senate by Sens. Kelly Ayotte, R-N.H., and Mark Warner, D-Va., will end the failed system of walking horse industry self-policing, ban the use of certain devices associated with soring, strengthen penalties, and hold accountable all those involved in this cruel practice. The measure has broad bipartisan support, with 140 cosponsors in the House. The Senate bill was introduced just before the August recess.

Key reforms in the PAST Act:

- Prohibits the use in the Tennessee walking horse, Racking horse and Spotted Saddle horse breeds of “action devices”—chains strapped to a horse’s lower front legs, which agitate and strike the flesh already injured by caustic chemicals, causing the horse to lift his/her front legs higher off the ground in reaction to the pain.
- Prohibits the use in the same three named breeds of “stacks” or “performance packages”—tall, heavy stacks of material nailed to a horse’s hoof to lift his/her feet higher and strike the ground hard at an abnormal angle. The stacks are also often used to hide hard sharp objects inserted into the tender part of a horse’s hoof to increase the pressure and pain, creating the desired gait.
- Prohibits the actual soring of a horse for the purpose of showing or selling the horse, as well as the act of directing another to sore a horse for these purposes.
- Strengthens penalties to establish a more meaningful deterrent. The current Horse Protection Act’s misdemeanor criminal penalties would be raised to felony-level, providing up to three years’ jail time for each violation, and potential fines would be doubled. A third violation could trigger permanent disqualification from participating in any horse show, exhibition, sale or auction.
- Mandates that USDA, rather than industry organizations, assign licensed inspectors to horse shows when requested by show management—a reform that will create consistent, rigorous inspections and enforcement of penalties for violations.

Background:

- As part of its efforts to end the abuse of Tennessee walking horses and encourage humane and sound competition within the breed, The HSUS recently [sponsored the World Versatility Show](#), operated by the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association.
- In addition to offering this new incentive program to recognize those who promote their Tennessee walking horses humanely, The HSUS also offers a [reward of up to \\$10,000](#) for information leading to the arrest and conviction of any violator of the Horse Protection Act or any state law which prohibits soring, and [up to \\$5,000 for information](#) leading to disclosure of provable corruption of industry inspectors or officials in the enforcement of

the Act. Anyone with information on this cruel practice or associated corruption should call 855-NO-SORING (855-667-6746) or email equineprotection@humanesociety.org.

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The Humane Society of the United States is the nation's largest animal protection organization, rated the most effective by its peers. Since 1954, The HSUS has been fighting for the protection of all animals through advocacy, education and hands-on programs. We rescue and care for tens of thousands of animals each year, but our primary mission is to prevent cruelty before it occurs. We're there for all animals, across America and around the world. Celebrating animals and confronting cruelty – on the Web at humanesociety.org.

The Humane Society of the United States

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Celebrating Animals, Confronting Cruelty