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Rampant abuse decimating Walking Horse breed

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In December 2013, I requested the [Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration](#), which crowns the Tennessee Walking Horse World Grand Championship, return the Graceland Challenge trophy due to the rampant abuse in the Tennessee Walking Horse's "big lick" segment known as horse "soring."

This year, the event, which has been plagued with this abuse for more than a half-century, saw [inspectors from the U.S. Department of Agriculture](#) disqualify nearly half of the horses they inspected at the 10-day event due to signs of current soring, scarring and other violations of the Horse Protection Act of 1970. Additionally, all five judges of the event have recorded violations of the HPA.

Throughout the event, and as they have in the past, the pro-soring coalition in Tennessee continued to point fingers at the inspectors, arguing that the trainers were not violating the Horse Protection Act and abusing these majestic animals. Fortunately, the facts are on the side of the groups working together to eradicate soring by working to pass the Prevent All Soring Tactics Act, introduced by U.S. Reps. Ed Whitfield, R-Ky., and Steve Cohen, D-Tenn. That bill currently has 305 co-sponsors in the House and 57 in the Senate.

The PAST Act is supported by more than [600 groups](#) and key individuals, including the American Veterinary Medical Association, American Association of Equine Practitioners, American Horse Council, U.S. Equestrian Federation, National Sheriffs' Association, former Tennessee Gov. Winfield Dunn, former walking horse industry president [Bill Harlin](#), and the veterinary medical associations from all 50 states.

This year's Celebration was not such a celebration at all. Only three horses competed for the World Grand Championship, which typically has a dozen or so entries. Most of the horses had been disqualified in the weeks before by USDA inspectors. The crowd, which formerly boasted 30,000 fans in its heyday, dwindled to nearly 20 percent of that number, according to sources who attended. During the final week of the event, the media uncovered misrepresentations by the Celebration's [Veterinary Advisory Committee](#), which was clearly nothing more than a politically motivated move designed to lend credibility to the industry so that trainers could continue to abuse horses.

The horse that was crowned world grand champion, I Am Jose, was trained and ridden by [Casey Wright](#), who has numerous violations of the HPA for soring and abusing horses, and all but one of the top 10 trainers who received the most prize money at the Celebration have multiple HPA violations.

Astounding, isn't it? There is more. I must mention that the pro-soring coalition brought noted cockfighting advocate B.L. Cozad to the grounds of the Celebration to speak in its "Hall of Fame Club" against protecting animals from abuse. Cozad actually stated, "[Horse soring is a victimless crime. Why is it illegal?](#)" To Mr. Cozad, and the pro-soring groups, I say there are victims. The victims are the horses that have no voice, the equine industry that is being destroyed by these crimes, and the Tennesseans who no longer want their state to be known as the "horse abuse capital of the world."

Over the past several months, I have had numerous conversations with House Majority Leader [Kevin McCarthy](#), R-Calif., about bringing the PAST Act to a vote so this torture can be stopped for good, but it appears that [Speaker John Boehner](#) is now holding up the legislation. I thank McCarthy for his time, efforts and leadership on this issue and call on Boehner and Senate Majority Leader [Harry Reid](#) to bring the PAST Act to a vote during this Congress. Gentlemen, our country and our horses need you.

Priscilla Presley is an actress and founder and chairwoman of [Elvis Presley Enterprises](#).