The Soring of Tennessee Walking Horses and the Horse Protection Act

Keith Dane
Director of Equine Protection
The Humane Society of the United States
HSUS’s Role in Equine Welfare

- Inform, educate the public
- Engage our members to action
- Encourage responsible horse ownership
- Advocate for animal protective legislation and regulations
- Monitor, support, challenge agencies to enforce laws
Tennessee Walking Horse’s exaggerated show gait, the so-called “Big Lick” prized in southern gaited horse shows.

Man-made by means of soring - the painful and artificial altering of the gait accomplished chemically, mechanically, or both.
Chemical soring: caustic substances applied to front legs, chains affixed, causing pain. Horse snatches legs off ground, transfers weight onto hind legs.
How do the horse’s pasterns go

From This ➔ ➔ ➔ ➔ To This
...and this
...and this
...and even this?
2008 Violation
2009 Violation
Tennessee Walkers are mechanically sored by standing them on “stacks” of leather wedges 24/7, which alter the angle of the foot and force the horse to stand in an elevated, unnatural position.
This “stack” can shear off the horse’s hoof, causing pain and long-term damage.
Flat shod Tennessee Walkers (shown without stacks) may use heavy shoes weighing up to 10 pounds. These can also tear the horse’s hoof off.
Why Does Soring Exist?

Ego

Money

Blue Ribbons
Tennessee Walking Horses have been victims of abuse for decades.

Congress enacted the Horse Protection Act in 1970 primarily to protect this breed.
The Horse Protection Act of 1970

- 40 years later, soring persists
- Congress intended for HPA to end soring, not “regulate” it
- USDA charged with enforcement

Section 1. This Act may be cited as the "Horse Protection Act."

Section 2.

(3) The term "sore" when used to describe a horse means that - -
   (A) an irritating or blistering agent has been applied, internally or externally, by a person to any limb of a horse,
   (B) any burn, cut, or laceration has been inflicted by a person on any limb of a horse,
   (C) any tack, nail, screw, or chemical agent has been injected by a person into or used by a person on any limb of a horse, or
   (D) any other substance or device has been used by a person on any limb of a horse or a person has engaged in a practice involving a horse, and, as a result of such application, infliction, injection, use, or practice, such horse suffers, or can reasonably be expected to suffer, physical pain or distress, inflammation, or lameness when walking, trotting, or otherwise moving, except that such term does not include such an application, infliction, injection, use, or practice in connection with the therapeutic treatment of a horse by or under the supervision of a person licensed to practice veterinary medicine in the State in which such treatment was given.
Why Has HPA Failed to End Soring?

Lack of adequate USDA funding – only $500k per year – not enough for USDA to enforce Act on its own

Erratic enforcement due to lobbyists, political influence, threatened cutbacks
Funding of USDA Enforcement efforts capped by Congress in 1976 at $500,000

**Horse Protection Act**

**Section 12.**
There are authorized to be appropriated to carry out this Act $125,000 for the period beginning July 1, 1976, and ending September 30, 1976; and for the fiscal year beginning October 1, 1976, and for each fiscal year thereafter there are authorized to be appropriated such sums, not to exceed $500,000, as may be necessary to carry out this Act.
Why Has HPA Failed to End Soring?

Act does not cover private barns – only public horse shows, sales, transport

Industry “addiction” to Big Lick gait

Judges are trainers, who reward fellow trainers
Why Has HPA Failed to End Soring?

Cultural aversion to government oversight – “rather fight than switch”

Industry devises many ways to evade detection, avoid enforcement
Why Has HPA Failed to End Soring?

“Beating the System” with:

- Scar removal
- Masking agents
- Numbing agents
- “Stewarding” devices
- Horse switching
- Ticket taking
Why Has HPA Failed to End Soring?

USDA enforcement tools:

- Palpation
- Swabbing, GC/MS
- Thermography
- Digital Radiography
- New inspection protocols
Why Has HPA Failed to End Soring?

USDA has been forced to allow industry self-regulation – and industry self-regulation has failed to be an effective deterrent.

Industry presents veneer of compliance, boasts low violation rate based on statistics which dilute true percentage of sore horses.
Why Has HPA Failed to End Soring?

Industry inspectors, judges have conflicts of interest; alleged bribery/corruption

No Horse Industry Organization has ever been decertified by USDA for non-compliance (as authorized in HPA)
Why Has HPA Failed to End Soring?

Fact: last report to Congress issued by USDA (2000), stated that overall, 42% of horses its vets inspected had pathological abnormalities indicative of soring.

Among stacked horses the rate was 79%; among flat shod horses, 17%
Why Has HPA Failed to End Soring?

No report to Congress has been issued by USDA since 2000
Some Tennessee Walking Horse industry groups oppose soring...
...and work to eliminate the practice while promoting the sound, naturally gaited Tennessee Walker
<table>
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<th>National Coalition of Animal Welfare and Equine Groups</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Communicate with Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Monitor enforcement, comment to USDA</td>
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<td>• Mobilize members to action</td>
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<td>• Educate and inform the public</td>
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What can be done to end soring?

• Change judging standards
• Better HPA enforcement/more funding
• Stronger regulations
• Scientific research
• State laws/enforcement
• Raise public awareness
• Make soring “un-PC”
What Can You Do To Help End Soring?

• Contact your U.S. Congressman and Senators at congress.org. Urge them to increase funding for USDA’s Horse Protection Act enforcement.
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• Contact your U.S. Congressman and Senators at congress.org. Urge them to increase funding for USDA’s Horse Protection Act enforcement.

• Tell them to encourage USDA to enforce the Horse Protection Act and Regulations.
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• Contact your U.S. Congressman and Senators at congress.org. Urge them to increase funding for USDA’s Horse Protection Act enforcement.
• Tell them to encourage USDA to enforce the Horse Protection Act and Regulations.
• Contact Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack at Tom.Vilsack@usda.gov - tell him USDA must rigorously enforce the HPA.
What Can You Do To Help End Soring?

- Contact your U.S. Congressman and Senators at congress.org. Urge them to increase funding for USDA’s Horse Protection Act enforcement.
- Tell them to oppose any attempts to weaken the Horse Protection Act or its Regulations.
- Contact Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack at Tom.Vilsack@usda.gov - tell him USDA must rigorously enforce the HPA.
- Tell your friends about soring
Thank you very much to all of you for having taken the time to be here.
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