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December 22, 2013

Congressman Ed Whitfield  
2184 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Sir;

As you read this letter, there are Tennessee Walking Horses standing with their hooves nailed on stacks that contort their joints into unnatural angles, causing constant pain. They try to stop the pain by shifting their weight to their back legs, but that makes those joints hurt, too. They lay down, but only for short periods of time because the horse's body wasn't made for prolonged recumbence. It's been compared to a woman wearing high heels, but that comparison only works if you nail the heel to her feet then refuse to allow her to sit or lie down for more than a few minutes at a time.....for years.....while she is forced to go running four or five days a week... carrying twenty percent of her body weight on her back.

As if that weren't enough, people routinely come and paint the horse's pasterns with caustic chemicals, then wrap them in saran wrap and heavy cotton wraps. The chemicals make the skin tender and cause more pain in the deep tissues, pain the horse cannot escape. Then they take the horse out of his stall, add chains to his pasterns, and ride him with the chains flopping against the tenderized skin, the tortured joints hitting the ground and supporting the weight and speed of horse and rider with a pound, pound, pound at each step.

This is the traditional training technique for the big lick Tennessee Walking Horse, also known as the Performance horse. The pain in the front causes a shift of weight to the back, which is desirable, and the pain of the chains causes a lift to the front legs which is also desirable. It's all done for the glory and blue ribbons, and it's all at the expense of the horse. How do I know this? I used to do it, that's how.

I was raised riding these horses and watching the "training" methods. I saw the chemicals applied, mostly oil of mustard and diesel fuel. I saw the heavy chains used and the horses that had to be whipped to get them out of their stalls. I learned not to touch the pasterns because the horse might (and one time did) fall from the pain of my touch. I was taught that it's just the way the horse pays for its keep, the price of being fed and watered and given a warm stall. And I believed it. Kids are like that. The big lick has taught generations that their joy and pride are worth the torture of the horse, that causing gratuitous pain to another creature is okay as long as you win a ribbon. I'm pretty sure that's not the lesson my parents intended me to take from the show ring, but that's the one that hundreds of kids DO take. I only stopped allowing my horses to be soled when I realized that my children would learn this, and that was not something I wanted to happen.

The Walking Horse industry touts its own inspection program and a 98% compliance rate. This is fiction. The pain in the joints caused by stacks isn't even detectable during the usual inspection. The chemical soring occurs back at the barn days before inspection and can be covered up with local anesthetics. The stacks themselves cover evidence of sharp objects placed between them and the hoof. For every horse found to be sore, hundreds are sore but pass the inspection process. The practice of soring is so common that, in my thirty years in the horse show business, I only knew two trainers that I knew would not sore a horse.

Fifteen years ago I spoke out publically against soring in an article in the Nashville Tennessean. At the time I had just resigned as Vice President of the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders' and Exhibitors' Association. I hoped my stand might have guided the industry towards safe, humane methods of training, but I was wrong. Today I speak up again because the best hope for the horses is here in the PAST Act, also known as HR 1518 and S 1406. This would ban the use of the stacks and chains on Walking Horses, among others, in the show ring and make arrangements for more stringent methods of inspection.

The chains and stacks have to go because the Walking Horse industry has proven itself incapable of using them responsibly. Having horses flat shod would ease the strain on the joints and the pain that accompanies it as well as making pressure shoeing more difficult to hide. Banning the use of chains would make the use of chemicals easier to detect. Putting the inspection process in the hands of the USDA would mean that the inspectors would actually want to find violators rather than colluding with the industry in hiding the practice. Released from the ball and chain of soring, the Walking Horse could take its place among the great horse breeds of the world. The current dwindling show circuits would prosper and the markets of Europe and South America would open to our horses. More importantly, future generations of children would be taught that enjoying animals and using animals need not mean torturing animals.

Thank you for putting forth the PAST Act. The PAST Act is good for the Tennessee Walking Horse, good for future generations of horsemen, good for the country and, quite simply, the right thing to do. If I can help in any way please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

*Pamela B. Reband MD*

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