

**Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and
Homeland Security
Hearing on the Prevention of Equine Cruelty Act of
2008 (H.R. 6598)
and the Animal Cruelty Statistics Act of 2008
(H.R. 6597)
U.S. House of Representatives**

**Testimony of Douglas G. Corey, DVM
Immediate Past President
American Association of Equine Practitioners**

July 31, 2008

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Chairman Scott and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. I am Dr. Douglas Corey and I have practiced equine veterinary medicine for more than 30 years. I am here today as the immediate past president of the American Association of Equine Practitioners as well as a past chairman of the AAEP's Equine Welfare Committee. The AAEP is a professional association representing nearly 10,000 veterinarians and veterinary students worldwide. Our mission is to protect the health and welfare of the horse.

Unwanted horses in the United States are facing a crisis. From New York to California, horses that are considered at-risk in the equine population are being severely impacted by a struggling economy, high grain and hay prices, and the closure last year of the U.S.'s three remaining processing plants. The result: increased equine cruelty in the form of abuse, neglect, and abandonment.

You have to look no further than national magazines and your own local newspapers to see evidence of the negative impact on the unwanted horse population:

- **From *Time Magazine*, May 2008: “An Epidemic of Abandoned Horses”** – “Rising grain and gas prices, as well as the closure of American slaughterhouses, have contributed to a virtual stampede of horses being abandoned – some starving – and turned loose into the deserts and plains of the West to die cruel and lonesome deaths.”
- **From *USA Today*, March 2008: “U.S. Shelters Saddled with Unwanted Horses”** – “Neglected horses are showing up across the country. While some shelters say they have room for more horses, shelters in Virginia, Tennessee and Illinois say they are full.”
- **In the *Washington Post*, January 2008: “Loudoun County (Virginia) Gets 48 Cruelly Treated Horses”** –

“A Loudoun County judge ruled yesterday that 48 horses seized by county officials last week were "cruelly treated," and he awarded custody of the thoroughbreds to the county.”

- **And from my home state of Oregon, the *Bend Bulletin* headline from just last week that read “Oregon Horse Owners Face Tough Decisions” –**
“Around Central Oregon, where hay is selling for higher and higher prices in an otherwise sluggish economy, more people are trying to sell their horses or give them away to rescue organizations and animal shelters. With so many horses coming in to the few local facilities equipped to handle large animals, some say the situation is reaching a crisis point.”

Headlines aside, those of us who are in the field every day practicing equine medicine know the harsh realities confronting horses that are unwanted. My colleagues are increasingly alarmed by their growing number of clients who can no longer care for their animals. Fortunately, some of these horses are sold to new owners or are able to be placed in a rescue or retirement facility. However, many more of these horses are left unsold at auctions, even with a rock-bottom sale price. Others endure a worse fate of being neglected by their owners or abandoned. In the state of Colorado alone, equine cruelty investigations increased by 40 percent in 2007.¹

While it is difficult to get an accurate count of the total number of unwanted horses in the U.S., we know from the number of horses currently being sent to other processing plants in North America that the number is in the tens of thousands. In 2006, the last year that U.S. horse processing plants were open for an entire fiscal year, the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture reported that over 102,000 horses were processed in this country alone. The vast majority of these horses were unwanted. And while the processing plants are currently closed in the U.S., the only option for many of today’s unwanted horses remains processing at a facility outside of the United States.

The AAEP advocates the humane care of all horses and believes the equine industry and horse owners have a responsibility to provide humane care throughout the life of the horse. We recognize that there truly is a perfect storm of factors impacting this complex issue right now. Because of the large population of unwanted horses in the U.S., the AAEP believes that the processing of unwanted horses is currently a necessary end-of-life option and provides a humane alternative to allowing a horse to continue a life of discomfort and pain or endure inadequate care or abandonment.

Our chief reason for opposing this legislation is not because our association believes that sending a horse to a processing plant is the best option for reducing the unwanted horse population. Our opposition exists because this legislation does not help address the long-term care and funding that will be necessary to help the tens of thousands of horses that will be affected by a ban. Assuming a bare minimum cost of \$5 per day for a horse’s basic needs, which doesn’t include veterinary or farrier expenses, the funding needed per year, per horse, is approximately \$1,825. Multiply this, for example, by the number of

¹ Colorado Unwanted Horse Alliance, “Colorado Unwanted Horse Environmental Assessment,” 2008.

horses that have been sent to Mexican processing facilities thus far in 2008², and you have 30,000 horses with a cost of care per year of \$55 million dollars. This does not include the large number of horses that are also going to Canada. Can the federal government help fund the care of these horses?

Those who support a ban on horse processing often state that there are currently an adequate number of equine rescue and retirement facilities to care for all of the horses that need homes. I dispute that claim. While there are a number of facilities in the U.S. providing homes for old and unwanted horses, the capacity of these individual facilities is usually limited to 30 horses or less. Rescue operators themselves are having to turn away horses and are pleading for financial assistance. The infrastructure to care for this many unwanted horses is simply not yet in place. Many dedicated individuals are doing all they can on a shoestring budget, but the need is overwhelming.

In closing, this legislation is premature. Horse processing is symptomatic of a much larger issue, and that is how to reduce the number of unwanted horses in the United States. We believe the equine industry must work together to help these animals by educating owners and encouraging responsible horse ownership. That is why the Unwanted Horse Coalition (UHC) was formed in 2005 by the AAEP and now operates under the American Horse Council. Current Unwanted Horse Coalition member organizations include:

- American Association of Equine Practitioners
- American Paint Horse Association
- American Quarter Horse Association
- American Veterinary Medical Association
- The California Thoroughbred Breeders Association
- Emerald Downs
- The Jockey Club
- Lifesavers Wild Horse Rescue
- Maryland Horse Breeders Association
- Masters of Foxhounds Association of America
- Minnesota Horse Council
- Mustang Heritage Foundation
- National Horsemen's Benevolent Protective Association
- National Thoroughbred Racing Association
- Pinto Horse Association of America
- Primedia Equine Network
- Professional Rodeo Stock Contractors
- Professional Rodeo Cowboys Association
- AHC State Horse Council Committee
- Thoroughbred Owners and Breeders Association
- United States Dressage Federation
- United States Equestrian Federation
- United States Polo Association

² USDA Market News Service, "U.S to Mexico Weekly Livestock Export Summary," July 24, 2008.

- U.S. Trotting Association

This is a diverse group of organizations that represent breed, discipline, veterinary and welfare interests. The UHC offers an online directory of facilities in the U.S. that provide placement options for unwanted horses. The UHC has also developed several valuable resources for horse owners to assist in making responsible decisions regarding the long-term care of horses. UHC-member groups are committed to reducing the unwanted horse population.

Society has been working to address a similar overpopulation problem with dogs and cats for years, and yet millions of animals are still euthanized each year at humane shelters. But horses are different animals, both literally and figuratively. The issues we are addressing today are very complex. Solving this issue in the horse industry will take time, but the industry has deemed it an important priority and is working to solve it.

Last month the AAEP polled its membership on this issue, and 75 percent of our members believe that horse processing should remain, at this time, an end-of-life option.³ We, the horse veterinarians of this country, know that passage of this bill will put the unwanted horse population at even greater risk. I urge you to carefully consider the unintended consequences of this bill.

Thank you.

³ AAEP Membership Survey, June 2008.