

Horse slaughter opponents not doing animals any favors

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Editor:

I am writing in response to the Nov. 15 letter from Mrs. Gay Metcalf of Spring Creek regarding her perception on the current issue of horse slaughter in the United States. So that the general public might be presented with both sides of the issue, I would like to take the opportunity to rebut and clarify several points made in her letter.

Firstly, it is true that animal welfare groups trying to help horses have actually hurt them. This is why: when horses were being slaughtered in the United States the process was highly regulated by the USDA, and deemed to be humane by two major veterinary associations, the American Veterinary Medical Association and the American Association of Equine Practitioners. Now instead, horses must be hauled for much greater distances to the processing plant, and, in Mexico, endure a much crueler fate.

In some Mexican processing plants, instead of a quick and painless death by captive bolt gun (which is the same method used to kill cattle, sheep, and pigs), the horses are killed by what is called the puntilla method. They are stabbed in the spine until they are rendered paralyzed, strung up by a hind leg, and bled to death. So yes, the "animal welfare" groups have really done these horses a great deal of harm by forcing American processing plants to close.

In addition, since the American processing plants have closed, reports of abandonment and neglect of horses have reached an all-time high. People that no longer have the ability or desire to feed and care

for a horse have no other option, since veterinary induced euthanasia and carcass disposal are expensive. Their horses, often backyard pets that have had feed and water hand delivered to them their whole lives, are turned out on public or private ranch land to fend for themselves, and to become a problem for landowners. Without having been raised on the range and learning how to forage and find water, these horses will thirst and starve to death. Another cruel fate for which horses can thank the animal welfare groups.

Another point in dire need of being refuted is Mrs. Metcalf's statement that wild horses are slaughtered. Legislation completely separate from the bill currently being considered prevents wild horses from being slaughtered for human consumption, and has done so for several years. Instead, wild horses live out taxpayer-subsidized lives, since the vast majority of them are never adopted. By taking the practical, humane option of processing a horse away from private horse owners, these thousands of horses would directly compete with mustangs for new homes.

Claims that already overburdened shelters and sanctuaries can take in the thousands of unwanted horses are dead wrong. It has been established through Congressional research that there is simply no more room in the existing rescue network. Many of these places have been shut down due to ironically inhumane conditions. Such self-proclaimed rescue facilities continu-

ally milk the public for funding, and in a time when a ton of hay can easily cost \$200, keeping these "rescued" horses fed is no easy feat. And that does not include the cost of general health maintenance and veterinary care.

Make no mistake: animal welfare groups have done nothing but harm to the American equine population through their blatant ignorance. Slaughter is a necessary part of the horse industry — there is currently no other humane alternative in existence.

Until those campaigning to end it can put their money where their mouths are, and personally assume physical and financial responsibility for literally thousands of unwanted horses, they have no reasonable right to dictate how horse owners handle their private property, nor to presume to know more about humane treatment of slaughter-bound animals than licensed veterinary medical professionals.

Looking at the big picture, it is nothing but arrogant, hypocritical ethnocentrism for Americans (especially those with no working knowledge of horses or vested interest in the horse industry) to deem horses to be above human consumption, while at the same time enjoying the many products, food and otherwise, produced from the slaughter of other large livestock — livestock killed by the same method that is mysteriously acceptable for animals that aren't as aesthetically pleasing or irrationally idolized as the horse.

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