

Legislative Update:

Animal welfare groups commend U.S. House of Representatives for passing critical amendment to ban horse slaughter

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WASHINGTON—The U.S. House of Representatives has passed the Carter-Fitzpatrick Amendment to the INVEST in America Act, which would ban the slaughter of American equines. Led by Reps. Troy Carter, D-La., Brian Fitzpatrick, R-Pa., Steve Cohen, D-Tenn., John Katko, R-N.Y., Dina Titus, D-Nev., Vern Buchanan, R-Fla., Paul Tonko, D-N.Y., Buddy Carter, R-Ga., Andy Barr, R-Ky., Donald Payne Jr., D-N.J., Jan Schakowsky, D-Ill., Jerry Nadler, D-N.Y., and Guy Reschenthaler, R-Pa., this bipartisan amendment would ban the transport of equines for the purpose of slaughter, effectively ending the slaughter of American horses for human consumption if enacted into law. The measure is supported by leading animal welfare groups, including the ASPCA® (The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals®), the Animal Welfare Institute, the Humane Society of the United States, the Humane Society Legislative Fund, and Return to Freedom Wild Horse Conservation—members of a coalition that worked with the sponsors and members of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee to strengthen the language of this new amendment.

American horses have not been slaughtered for human consumption in the U.S. since 2007, thanks to overwhelming public opposition to this inhumane practice and a federal restriction on funding. However, a loophole in the law allows tens of thousands of our nation's beloved equines to be trucked across U.S. borders each year to suffer a cruel and unnecessary fate.

“Horses aren't bred for food, and Americans don't want them bought under false pretenses, forced into overcrowded trailers, tormented on a thousand-mile journey, and then prodded to slaughterhouses”.

—Said Rep. Troy Carter (D-LA) sponsor of the amendment.

“This important bipartisan amendment stops equines from being slaughtered for human consumption,” said amendment sponsor Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA). “Horses deserve better and we must lend a voice to the voiceless to help end the practice of American horses being needlessly slaughtered.”

“Nevada is home to the largest population of wild horses in the nation,” said Rep. Dina Titus (NV-01). “Today we took a crucial step to shut down the horse slaughter pipeline permanently. The American people do not support the wholesale killing of these beautiful animals and I am proud that our persistent efforts have gotten us to this moment.”

“The overwhelming majority of Americans oppose horse slaughter for human consumption and the ASPCA is working resolutely to solve equine welfare issues on the ground, but we cannot fully succeed while the slaughter pipeline remains open,” said Nancy Perry, senior vice president of Government Relations for the ASPCA. “We are grateful to Representatives Carter, Fitzpatrick, and the full bipartisan team for their leadership on this amendment that will finally end this shameful chapter in American history and provide protections to American horses and the people who love them.”

“This is a historic moment for the protection of America's horses and hopefully a harbinger of the end of the predatory horse slaughter industry in the United States,” said Cathy Liss, president of the Animal Welfare Institute. “Since the early 1980s, millions of horses have endured harrowing journeys to the slaughterhouse before being hauled brutally off the trucks and into the kill box. Congress now has a prime opportunity to expressly prohibit the movement of horses to slaughter, safeguarding horse welfare and public health. We are so grateful to Representatives Carter, Fitzpatrick, Titus, Cohen, Katko, and the numerous other champions who spearheaded the House passage of this amendment.”

“It's pretty rare to find anyone willing to defend the slaughter of American horses for human consumption these days,” says Sara Amundson, president of the Humane Society Legislative Fund. “Most of us would support any effective proposal to end it, and a major bipartisan infrastructure package that includes an amendment to prohibit the transport of horses for such slaughter is a spectacular and fitting way to bring down the curtain on this sad and sorry practice. We were glad to work so closely with congressional leaders and like-minded organizations to produce the version that passed today.”

“More than 1.4 million American horses—including an unknown number who once roamed freely on our public lands—have been shipped to foreign slaughterhouses since the last such plant in the United States closed,” said Neda DeMayo, president of Return to Freedom Wild Horse Conservation. “Their deaths have been a betrayal of the animals who helped us build this country and that continue to serve humanity. It's time to close the slaughter pipeline for good and we commend Representatives Carter, Fitzpatrick, Titus, Cohen, Katko, and the other bipartisan leaders of this amendment.”

In recent years, the number of American horses shipped to Canada and Mexico to be slaughtered for human consumption has dropped, making this an especially opportune time for Congress to close this legal loophole that causes so much suffering. Last year, approximately 35,000 horses were exported for slaughter—a drastic decline from the high of 166,000 just eight years prior. Research published in 2017 found that 2.3 million Americans have the desire and resources to adopt a horse. America's equine adoption community is working swiftly to match the horses in their care with foster and adoptive families, increasing the number of adoptions every year. This means that every horse who might be sent to slaughter has a home waiting, if given the opportunity to find it.

The horse slaughter industry not only exploits horses, who endure grueling journeys to slaughter plants and an inhumane death, but also harms the broader equine community, including horse owners, riders, and rescues, who fear that their horses will end up in the slaughter pipeline despite their best efforts to keep them safe. Kill buyers—those who buy horses to ship to slaughter in Canada and Mexico—attend auctions and often outbid rescue groups trying to help vulnerable equines. Kill buyers have also been known to pose as good homes in response to ads from horse owners who can no longer care for their animals. Many owners are so fearful that they may even keep their horses beyond the point they can care for them to prevent their sale to slaughter. Horses have even been stolen out of their stalls or pastures and shipped to slaughter.

We urge the U.S. Senate to take similar action and include a horse slaughter ban in their version of the surface transportation bill. If the Carter-Fitzpatrick Amendment is included in the final version of the bill that is approved by both chambers, it would have the same net effect as the Save America's Forgotten Equines (SAFE) Act (H.R. 3355)—banning the slaughter both here and abroad of American equines for human consumption.