

Slaughter transport bill

Is it worthy of law?

The following is an opinion piece from Cathleen Doyle, president of the California Equine Council, on the federal Commercial Transportation for Horses for Slaughter bill. The bill was recently passed in the United States Senate and has been sent to the United States House of Representatives.

How does a controversial industry that operates against the will of the majority of American people become legitimate?

It does so by drafting ambiguously written federal legislation that allows their operation to run practically unimpeded, getting endorsements from appropriate "industry" associations, making the penalty a "library fine," placing the word "safe" or "humane" in the title, and (the seal of approval) getting a national animal welfare group to co-sponsor. Thus is the recipe for the Commercial Transportation for Horse for Slaughter Act.

From the perspective of the equine community, this bill has three goals: to prohibit the transport of horses in cattle or hog trucks, to give them food, water and rest at humane intervals; and to institute a "fit to travel" inspection. The bill achieves only one of the three goals.

This bill is terribly flawed in that it:

Will not be enacted for one year. Better to drop this toxic bill now and come back next year with a good one.

Will not be enacted unless funds are appropriated. All the harmful precedents (which will be unchanged for the next 10 to 15 years and ultimately affect other animals carried in commercial transport) will have passed into law, but the bill will not be enacted or enforced.

Does not prohibit or eliminate the transport of horses on cattle and hog trucks because of the intentional use of vague and ambiguous language.

Does not prohibit cross-species carrying, which could result in horses being carried on the bottom level of vehicles with hogs or other species walking and urinating over the horses' heads.

Does not set a limit on the number of horses hauled. Truckers and killer buyers determine what is "appropriate."

Creates an unenforceable stallion segregation policy that will probably result in all colts one year of age and other stallions to be castrated—many without anesthesia—to avoid having to segregate. The castrated horses would have to be shipped no more than four days after castration to meet the seven day certificate of inspection window.

Veterinary "fit to travel" inspections will not be performed by an "equine" veterinarian, but rather by any accredited veterinarian. Therefore, we could have dog or cat veterinarians, hired by auction houses or killer buyers, doing the inspections.

Gives a seven-day "grace period" on certificates of inspection, giving both the veterinarian and the shipper too wide a time margin to exonerate themselves from responsibility of non-compliance. If a horse is called into question, the veterinarian can say the horse was fine a week ago when

he inspected it. If the horse injures himself or gets sick after the inspection, which can certainly happen given the long period of time, the shipper already has a veterinarian certificate stating the horse is fit to travel.

Uses vague language such as "suffering from a broken or dislocated limb" and "unable to bear weight on all four." There is no definitive way of diagnosing breaks without radiographs, and horses with broken legs can be given Bute and be weight-bearing.

Allows "employees" of the slaughter plant to inspect unloadings for compliance and accept the certificate of inspection. Oversight is placed in the hands of an employee of the slaughter plant. *This is my personal favorite!*

Limits inspections and investigations to the USDA rather than all agencies with peace officer authority.

Does not address downed horses from the point of loading or while en route.

Does not address what happens to animals deemed "unfit to travel."

Provides all fines and forfeitures go to the Department of Agriculture rather than to law enforcement agencies, compromising motivation for enforcement or filings.

I have saved the worst for last. Sponsors of the legislation, including the Humane Society of the United States, decided horses going to slaughter deserve "different" and "lesser" humane standards than other horses. Accordingly they are sponsoring legislation that will, now and forever, make it legal for horses transported to slaughter to have water withheld for 24 hours. This is cruel and inhumane—especially for horses under intense stress, and going across the Mojave Desert in temperatures reaching 120 degrees.

We want to help these horses. This bill does not accomplish the mission.

Because of differing language between the House and Senate bills, the Farm Bill—to which the Slaughter Transport bill is attached in the Senate version only—is currently in a joint committee to equate language. The three politicians involved in discussing the Slaughter Transport amendment are Senators Richard Lugar (R-Indiana) and Patrick Leahy (D-Vermont), and Congressman Pat Roberts (R-Kansas).

We urge you to write or call Lugar at United States Senate: Hart Building, Room 306; Washington, DC 20510; 202-224-2035; Leahy at United States Senate: Russell Building, Room 433; Washington, DC 20510; 202-224-4242 and Roberts at House of Representatives; 1126 Longworth; Washington, DC 20515; 202-225-2171. Oppose the Commercial Transportation of Horses for Slaughter Act Amendment in the Senate Farm Bill and ask that the amendment be dropped, as the bill does not adequately protect the horses.