

# THE SAVE AMERICA'S FORGOTTEN EQUINES ACT

Thousands of Equines are Sent Abroad to Slaughter—the Senate Must Vote to Pass a Bill to Save Them

WORDS: MARGIE SLOAN

**D**EATH IS INEVITABLE FOR OUR HORSES. How they die is a decision we are often privileged to make with euthanasia, the last act of kindness.

The Save America's Forgotten Equines Act of 2021, known as the SAFE Act, addresses those unwanted horses, mules, and burros who are sent to Canada and Mexico for slaughter for human consumption. The bill has been proposed in the past but never passed as it lacked the necessary votes in the Senate.

While the majority of Americans are opposed to horse slaughter, most are unaware that it is still legal to send American horses across the border for slaughter. We recoil at the photos of the "processing" of the horse at foreign abattoirs where pain is of no

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concern to the butchers. But avoiding the unpleasant topic perpetuates the problem of what to do with thousands of at-risk horses, mules, and burros, who—through no fault of their own—face a terrible end to their lives.

The equines sent to the slaughter pipeline begin their journey at the auction where they are scrutinized for purchase. They are on display several times a year all across America.

The unwanted are not just the old and non-performing equines, but the healthy, young ones who didn't make it at the race track, show ring, or rodeo, and get left behind by owners no longer able or willing to care for them. They include foals and pregnant mares. The more they weigh, the more the kill buyers will bid for them, often outbidding the rescuers hoping to save them from the overcrowded trailer ride to the foreign death house. According to the US Department of Agriculture, 92% of the horses that are slaughtered are healthy and in good condition.

For anyone who has ever loved a horse, the thought of it on the menu is abhorrent. But not everyone loves horses. Texas kill buyer Mike McBarron says, "It's just a job to me. I mean, I don't fall in love with them."

But for those who know the thrill of communion with their mount, and those who revere and respect the magnificence of our equines, their value is immeasurable.

The final decision for our forgotten American equines to die hard or to die with dignity will be made by our elected officials in Congress. It's unlikely that anyone who previously voted against the SAFE Act has ever witnessed a horse's final moments during slaughter. They need to not only hear but to truly listen to the Americans who partner with horses for sport, for profit, for therapy and for companionship.

To that end, we spoke with many equestrians on the topic and share them here, in the hopes that fellow horsemen and horsewomen spread the word as well...



**MARY BABICK**

President, United States  
Hunter Jumper Association

**“We are the guardians of our horses. The responsibility for horse welfare and end of life choices are topics that should concern all horse people. We owe it to our horses to make humane choices for their end of life.”**

## TOM O'MARA

President, United States Equestrian Federation

"United States Equestrian Federation has been following the progress of this legislation and it's important that we address this issue as a community. We all care deeply for horses, regardless of whether they're wild in the west, competing internationally and representing the United States, or someone's best friend living freely on personal property. This has always been a challenging and emotional topic, but the humane care of horses is something we can all agree is in the best interest of the horse, but also our sport, and for the industry as a whole.



## PHILLIP DUTTON

Olympian, USA and Australia  
Eventers Riders Association of North America

"I WHOLEHEARTEDLY SUPPORT THE SAFE ACT BILL. I CAN'T EXPRESS PROPERLY HOW MUCH I VALUE HORSES CONSIDERING MY WHOLE LIFE HAS BEEN CENTERED AROUND THEM."

## MARY MITTEN

Executive Director, We Can Ride Equine Assisted Therapy

**"I'm against slaughter. I see small and large miracles everyday with our donated and rescued horses and their special needs riders."**

## ROXANNE TRUNNELL

Highest Ranked Para Dressage Athlete in the World  
Paralympian 2016 Rio de Janeiro and 2020 Tokyo

“To me, my horse is my best friend, a confidant, a therapist, and my muse. Because of my illness and stroke, I am not able to walk and express myself verbally, but with the horses, they loan me the use of their legs, and allow me to be seen and express my individuality without the use of words. Horses don't judge you. It doesn't matter that I'm in a wheelchair or that I talk funny. They are accepting of the way I am and if I provide them with love and kindness and trust, then they will in turn give that back 100%.

This is why I am pro last act of kindness—euthanasia. Taking a horse to the slaughterhouse is a cold-hearted act. These amazing animals are being faced to die scared and alone...where with euthanasia they can feel how loved they are before passing along. Horses are not a piece of sports equipment or a machine. They are living, breathing beings who put complete trust in their owners. We owe them the respect to show them just how much they mean to us and to have them feel completely loved right up to their last breath.”

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### KATIE ROSENFELS

Owner/Co-Founder, Free Ride Equestrian

“I strongly support Congressional efforts to end the still legal-pipeline for horses to be transported to Canada and Mexico for slaughter for human consumption. Horse owners have the option to euthanize their horse if they can no longer care for it. But to be able to sell the horse to ultimately end up in inhumane conditions and then slaughtered is not okay.

Many of the horses subjected to this ending are the wild ones rounded up by the BLM. I own an American Mustang and I'm proud to have been able to give him a new career. He is a wonderful athlete, kind and smart. I'm currently competing with him in 1st level dressage and training for 2nd level.

The horse industry in the USA puts billions into the economy and creates millions of jobs. From a financial perspective, it doesn't make sense to me that horses can't be either rehomed, given a job, or humanely euthanized.”

### PAMELA FLANAGAN

Governor at Large, United States Polo Association

***“I'm against slaughter and the unnecessary torture of these animals. I wish people would understand the reality of the unwanted equine debacle. I've rescued and found homes for many slaughter-bound horses. My rescued mare Stella, who was just a number in a lot a few years ago, is now a star polo pony. All my horses are microchipped and branded. They will never go to slaughter.”***



### DONALD V. LITTLE, JR

President Co-Owner, Centennial Farms Racing

“We make sure all our horses never get the option of slaughter. We register them with the Jockey Club both on paper and digitally with specific language, 'This horse was not bred for slaughter. For more information, please call 1-800-606-7273.'

Every horse we purchase has a \$1,000 rescue fund for aftercare that we create so that if a precarious situation occurs, we rescue it and bring it to a loving home. We just rescued one of ours that was sent to race in Puerto Rico and wasn't doing well. He is now home in Connecticut.”

### JOE FARGIS

Olympian, Gold Medalist  
Show Jumping 1988 Seoul

“Of course I'm against slaughter. I'm a guy who loves animals. No animal should suffer. Once you give a horse away or sell it at auction, you've lost control of its destiny. I'd rather euthanize my horse than to give it away or sell it and not know what happened to it. The journey itself to slaughter is horrific.”

### ANTHONY COPPOLA

President, United States  
Polo Association

“I'M AGAINST HORSE SLAUGHTER. I'M FOR THE LAST ACT OF KINDNESS—EUTHANASIA. WHEN MY HORSES RETIRE, I FIND THEM LOVING HOMES OR THEY COME HOME WITH ME TO MY FARM IN SOUTH CAROLINA.”

### SABINE SCHUT-KERY

Olympian, Silver Team Medal Dressage, Tokyo 2020

“***Slaughter is horrible! I don't understand how we can let our horses get to the slaughter house. The torture is awful. The horses can't speak for themselves. We have a responsibility as horsemen and horsewomen to do something about this. The power is within each of us. We can and we must make a difference and stop this needless cruelty.”***



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### GEORGINA BLOOMBERG

International Show Jumper • Animal Activist

“Horses have been a huge part of my life since I was four years old. Their role in my life has evolved over the years but their importance has only become greater. I loved them when I was a child but didn't fully appreciate what they gave me or how much the riding world would become my family and home. The animals are the roots of why we do this, but to me, the entire package from the horses to the people to the shows and the community have kept me in this place and

made me want to make this my work and my life. Horses have given me love and sometimes the ability to escape from the world. Horses have also given me purpose, have made me proud of myself and what I can accomplish. Horses have given me the confidence and tools I need to live a life with purpose.

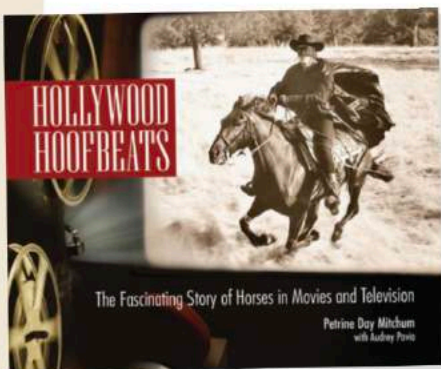
I would explain to US Congressional Representatives and US Senators how horses are transported to slaughter houses, how they are killed once they arrive, and also make sure they understand that every

horse is one bad sale away from the slaughter house. So many people think the horses that we ride could never end up there, but that couldn't be further from the truth. We see horses from all over the equine world end up in the wrong hands and on a truck headed to slaughter. Just the transport alone is cruel and inhumane, and I believe if our Representatives and Senators saw just one video of the transport, let alone the slaughter house...no questions asked...vote to save our horses, mules and burros.”



### PETRINE DAY MITCHUM

Author (with Audrey Pavia) of *Hollywood Hoofbeats, The Fascinating Story of Horses in Movies and Television*



“I'm anti-slaughter of equines for any reason. Horses have contributed so much to civilization: from our personal mobility, food cultivation and transportation of goods, to sport, amusement, and art. They are priceless partners in the story of human life.

Horses in America today are not raised for meat. Those unfortunate ones that go to slaughter to face inhumane ends are the by-products of the mismanagement of our wild herds and the racing and sport horse industries that have no regulated retirement plans for equines.

These systematic problems require legislative solutions, providing better management of lands federally designated for wild equines but often over grazed by domestic cattle. Wild horse populations can be controlled by humane birth control darting and in some cases, the reintroduction of natural predators such as wolves.

The racing industry is in need of a major overhaul. Regulation such as raising the minimum racing age from two to three would go a long way toward reducing the amount of “waste” horses. Horse owners should have a humane retirement plan in place before taking on the responsibility of a single equine.”

### WILLY ARTS

KWPN-NA Platinum Breeder

*“We must think for our horses. We must make the right decisions for them in life and in death. If you love your horse, then your horse always has a good life. If circumstances prevent a good life, because of injury, illness or financial strain, then you humanely euthanize your horse.”*

### ERIN PRUTOW

California Estate Planning Attorney and Equestrian

“I recommend to my clients, many who are horse and pet owners, that they create a trust for their large and small animals to ensure their continued care if they precede the animals in death or become unable to care for them. Sale to kill buyers will never happen.”

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### ELLIE PHIPPS PRICE

President, American Wild Horse Campaign

“There is no humanity in horse slaughter. There is no fiscal responsibility in the destruction of our wild herds. And there is no science behind the BLM’s failed wild horse and burro program. Horse slaughter is a horrific end for any horse, wild or domestic.”

The Bureau of Land Management has a plan. And, they are not even hiding it...slaughter America’s wild horses. Our wild ones are being betrayed by the US Government agency that is supposed to be protecting them. As the BLM rounds up and removes thousands more wild horses, mules and burros from our public lands, they incentivize slaughter with a broken adoption and payout program.”



### CHRISTINE TRAURIG

Olympian, 2000 Sydney, Bronze Team Medal Dressage  
USEF/USDF Young Horse Coach

“Looking at our history in the lives of humans, horses have always given loyal service in agriculture, in war, in transportation, and as a partner in sport. The thought alone that they can be slaughtered and that it is still legal in America to send

them across our borders for slaughter is unimaginable. We have a partnership with the horse, a compassionate bonding, and a true friendship. To think that we could slaughter them is wrong and it says something about our culture.”

### ROB WALTON

US Polo Hall of Fame, Polo Coach

*“I’m not for slaughter. You do the right thing. If your horse is sick or injured and has no chance at a good life, you euthanize it. If your horse is retired, pasture it with buddies. Don’t discard it or neglect it. Horse ownership isn’t for everyone. Taking responsibility for a horse takes a commitment that not everyone realizes.”*

## HOW HORSE-LOVING CHILDREN CAN HELP

**HOW DO WE** tell our children what happens to unwanted horses? The grim reality of slaughter is upsetting and sure to bring nightmares to sensitive children with plastic horses and ponies in their toy boxes. But Elizabeth Letts, author of *The Eighty-Dollar Champion*, says that children are the hope for America’s at-risk horses.

“Children are the best ambassadors for the horses,” she says. “They aren’t wallowing in the weeds of the arguments over the equine dilemma.

Children just love horses, pure and simple. Snowman was real and he was just in need of love and a second chance. Kids get it.”

In her book, Letts tells the true story of Snowman, the champion show jumper, to young readers. Purchased off a slaughter truck for \$80, the skinny white plow horse and trainer Harry de Leyer shared a bond born out of mutual need. de Leyer needed a reliable lesson horse for children and Snowman needed rescuing.

Snowman had kind eyes and the horseman took a chance.

In the time that Letts spent with de Leyer, who has since passed away, she learned about the heights that Snowman would go to please his rider. He jumped higher and higher, winning the US Open Jumper Championships in 1958 and 1959. It was Snowman’s way of thanking de Leyer for giving him a good life. Snowman passed on at 26



with the last act of kindness. As de Leyer mourned Snowman, he said, “He was not just a horse to me. He was my best friend.”

Letts remembers that long after Snowman passed,

de Leyer still cried when talking about him. Her hope is that the story will continue to inspire future horse owners.

“The story remains the same, just told so the young child can appreciate what happens when a horse is shown care, comfort and valued for his spirit. Perhaps our best hope for ending the cruelty that we have foisted upon our horses, is the coming together of kids who won’t take no for an answer,” says Letts. “They will pester their parents and maybe then their parents will pester the politicians who will vote on the SAFE ACT.”

### ELIZABETH LETTS

New York Times best-selling author of *The Eighty-Dollar Champion*

“I’m 100% percent against slaughter. There is no gray area. The entire horse community has to look into this issue. We have a responsibility to horses as a species that we have domesticated and used for two millennium. Today’s horses are the reflection of our highest aspirations for them. Inhumane slaughter is not an option for them when their numbers are too many. This is a solvable problem and we must put our will to it.” ∞