

The Horse Industry Supports America's Veterans, Applauds Increased Federal Funds for Equine-Assisted Therapy

Background:

The U.S. horse industry, which supports nearly one million American jobs and contributes \$122 billion to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), urges Congress to continue to increase funds for equine assisted activity therapy (EAAT) to help our nation's warriors when they return from combat. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2018, Congress increased funds for EAAT by \$1 million within the budget for the Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA). For FY2019, Congress has allocated \$1.5 million to EAAT within the Adaptive Sports Program. Congress has recognized the effectiveness of EAAT by increasing funds for two consecutive years.

The robust equine therapy provisions trace their roots to pro-horse industry measures championed by Rep. Barr (R-KY), directing Congress to allocate more resources to VA for equine therapy. In addition to providing invaluable services to U.S. veterans, equine-assisted therapy operations support more than 6,700 jobs and generate \$311.7 million in annual revenues, according to a 2017 economic impact study.

Status:

On September 13, Congress approved \$1.5 million for EAAT in the FY2019 VA spending package (H.R. 5895). Because the demand for EAAT for veterans exceeded available federal resources in FY2018, lawmakers increased funding by 50% over the previous year's levels. The horse industry applauds lawmakers for continuing to increase resources for equine therapy to help America's veterans transition to civilian life.

Take Action:

House Message: Tell your House lawmakers that you are pleased that Congress continues to increase federal resources for equine therapy for America's warriors. The House has taken the lead on this important issue for veterans, and convinced colleagues in the Senate to follow suit.

Senate Message: The horse industry congratulates the U.S. Senate for adopting provisions in the FY2019 spending package that recognize the importance of equine therapy for America's warriors. By increasing federal funds for EAAT, the Senate acknowledges that equine therapy gives a leg-up to veterans adjusting to civilian life.

Electronic Logging Devices (ELD) and Commercial Driver's License (CDL) Regulations

Background:

In 2017, the American Horse Council (AHC) met with Department of Transportation (DOT) officials and allied industry and livestock groups to share compliance information related to enforcement of DOT's ELD mandate. In late 2017, AHC shared specific issues with the DOT and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) and submitted requests for clarification of aspects of the rule. In early 2018, the agency responded to AHC's request, releasing equine-specific guidance highlighting the sector's compliance expectations.

Status:

DOT and FMCSA's ELD guidance issued in early 2018 combined with the delay of ELD enforcement to September 30, granted in the FY 2018 Appropriations Omnibus, have accomplished a great deal to address common sense transport concerns shared by equine enthusiasts. In June, the House Appropriations Committee approved the FY 2019 DOT funding bill that delays enforcement of the ELD mandate until October 1, 2019. In August, the Senate adopted a "minibus" to fund multiple government operations during FY 2019 that includes two industry supported provisions championed by Sen. Fischer (R-NE): the first would delay ELD enforcement until October 1, 2019; and the other calls on DOT to complete a study on split sleeper berths in a timely manner.

Additional efforts to address the issues brought into the light include S.2938, the "Transporting Livestock Across America Safely (TLAAS) Act," which will allow livestock haulers to more appropriately note on duty, off road hours of service and increases the "air mile rule" to 300 miles. Also, H.R.5358, the Developing Responsible Individuals for a Vibrant Economy (DRIVE-Safe) Act, would allow 18 years olds to apply for a CDL. H.R.5948, the Small Carrier Electronic Logging Device Exemption Act of 2018, will exempt carriers with 10 or fewer trucks from the ELD mandate. And H.R.5949, the Agricultural Business Electronic Logging Device Exemption Act of 2018, would completely exempt agricultural businesses.

Take Action:

AHC supports provisions in FY 2019 appropriations that delay ELD enforcement for livestock haulers until October 1, 2019. Congress must include the ELD delay in a final spending bill to allow policy makers the time to finalize a permanent and practical solution to the issue of the rule's applicability.

Farm Bill Alert: Horse Industry Supports Three-Pronged Program to Protect Animal Health

Background:

The U.S. horse industry, which supports nearly one million American jobs and contributes \$122 billion to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), urges Congress to pass farm legislation that maximizes protections from threats to equine herd health that could potentially undermine the agricultural economy and disrupt interstate commerce. Disease outbreaks are an ever present concern felt by anyone who takes his or her horse off the farm, or brings a new horse into their barn. These health concerns catalyzed development of the industry-led and funded Equine Disease Communication Center, a web based tool that monitors outbreaks and their subsequent quarantines, reporting factual and up-to-date information on the threats that exist to our animals nationwide.

Status:

On June 21, the House narrowly passed the Agriculture and Nutrition Act of 2018 (H.R. 2). The House bill addresses some of the horse industry's top priorities by adopting a three-pronged approach to protect herd health: authorization of a new National Animal Disaster Preparedness and Response (NADPR) program; additional support for the National Animal Health Laboratory Network (NAHLN); and creation of the National Animal Health Vaccine Bank that prioritizes risks posed by Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD), among other threats. H.R. 2 creates a level of certainty by adequately funding key animal health initiatives through FY 2019, but reducing those funds during subsequent years. For example, the horse industry and its partners requested \$70 million each year to fund the NADPR, but received \$30 million for 2020 and beyond. H.R. 2 authorizes \$150 million for a "priority FMD vaccine bank," opening the door to fund vaccines that will combat other diseases.

The following week, the Senate voted overwhelmingly to pass its version of the farm bill (S. 3042). While the horse industry appreciates the inclusion of a NADPR in both the House and Senate versions, the horse industry urges Congress to adopt the House provisions authorizing the three-pronged program to protect animal health, including specific dollar amounts. While the senate bill authorizes a three-part program to protect herd health, it only authorizes "sums as necessary" to fund the NADPR and vaccine bank, creating uncertainty for stakeholders.

Take Action:

Congress must pass a farm bill that fully funds a three-pronged program to combat threats to the agricultural economy posed by animal diseases. To that end, Congress should adopt provisions from H.R. 1 to authorize a NADPR, additional support for laboratories, and creation of a National Animal Health Vaccine Bank, in its final bill.

Tell Congress to Fix Guest Worker Shortages, Grow American Business!

Background:

The U.S. horse industry, which supports nearly one million American jobs and contributes \$122 billion to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), urges Congress to pass important legislation that will provide relief for chronic labor shortages, especially in the agricultural sector. To bridge the gap between labor needs, and worker supply, the horse industry relies on two major guest worker programs managed by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), specifically the H-2A and H-2B programs. Unfortunately piles of red tape and ambiguous work requirements delay the issuance of timely visas and prevent the horse industry and other sectors from hiring the workers they need.

There are two vehicles moving through Congress that can fix the shortage. The AG and Legal Workforce Act of 2018 (H.R. 6417), introduced in late June, clearly states that **personnel involved in the “management and training of equines” will qualify to participate in a newly-created H-2C visa program for farm workers.** Furthermore, the bill reduces financial and paperwork mandates, and establishes a baseline of up to 450,000 visas. The second vehicle, the House FY2019 DHS (H.R. 6776) appropriation, addresses the stringent 66,000 cap imposed on the issuance of H-2B visas by providing an exemption for returning workers. This “returning worker” exemption not only provides much needed cap relief, but will reduce red tape for seasonal employers.

Status:

Since House Judiciary Committee Chairman Bob Goodlatte (R-VA) introduced the AG and Legal Workforce Act in late June, the bill has garnered more than 110 co-sponsors, underscoring support to reform the broken H-2A visa program. With respect to the H-2B visa program, the House version of the FY2019 DHS appropriation (H.R. 6776) includes the industry-preferred “returning worker exemption.” Congress will not take up the FY2019 DHS funding bill until after the November election.

Action:

House Message: Sign up as a co-sponsor of the AG and Legal Workforce Act (H.R. 6417). The legislation not only reforms the agriculture visa program, but it identifies the horse industry as a program beneficiary, creating certainty for the equine sector. On the H-2B visa front, tell your lawmaker to preserve the “returning worker exemption” included in the House version of the FY2019 DHS funding bill, as the legislation moves forward.

Senate Message: Tell your senators that House colleagues are moving legislation that identifies the horse industry as an eligible sector to participate in a reformed H-2A visa program and to support any similar measure in the Senate, moving forward. With respect to H-2B visas, tell your senators that the House version of the FY2019 DHS appropriations bill includes important H-2B visa “cap relief” that the senate should support as the bill moves forward.

Tell Congress to Pass the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act of 2018!

Background:

The U.S. horse industry, which supports nearly one million American jobs and contributes \$122 billion to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), urges Congress to pass the bipartisan Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act (H.R. 1847/S. 2957). The PAST Act lays out a common sense solution to prevent the continued practice of taking action on a horse's limb to produce a higher gait that may cause pain, distress, inflammation, or lameness. The bill establishes a new system for inspecting horses for soring, revises penalties for violations of the Act, and modifies enforcement procedures.

Limited in scope, the bill outlines a specific framework to focus enforcement efforts on three horse breeds that continue to be the target of soring practices, including Tennessee Walking Horses, Spotted Saddle Horses, and Racking Horses. The treatment of these select breeds stands in stark contrast to the dramatic decline in the overall mistreatment of horses that has occurred since enactment of the HPA more than 40 years ago. By supporting the PAST Act, your elected officials will help modernize the Horse Protection Act of 1970 and end the practice of “soring” in the U.S.

Status:

Since Reps. Yoho (R-FL) and Schrader (D-OR) introduced the PAST Act (H.R. 1847) in 2017, the House bill has won co-sponsorship from 284 House lawmakers, representing nearly two-thirds of elected representatives! Since that time, House leadership has referred the bill to the Energy and Commerce Committee. Sens. Crapo (R-ID) and Warner (D-VA) have introduced S. 2957, which is identical to the House bill. Although the bill has won 26 cosponsors since introduction in May, Senate leadership has referred the legislation to the Commerce Committee, where it has not moved.

Action:

House Message: Tell your representative to urge Speaker Ryan (R-WI) and Minority Leader Pelosi (D-CA) to schedule a vote on the House floor and pass the bi-partisan PAST Act! Also, tell your lawmakers to support any effort to attach the PAST Act as an amendment to the 2018 farm bill, which the House is expected to consider before September 30.

Senate Message: Tell your senators to join the growing list of co-sponsors of S. 2957, and add momentum to this important, common-sense measure! If your senators are already co-sponsors, thank them for their support, and ask them to recruit senate colleagues to join the bipartisan group of PAST Act supporters!

Tell Congress to Pass Trails Bills! Support the RNR Act, Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act

Background:

The U.S. horse industry, which supports nearly one million American jobs and contributes \$122 billion to Gross Domestic Product (GDP), urges Congress to pass two important bills: the bipartisan Recreation Not Red-Tape (RNR) Act (H.R. 3400/S. 1633); and the Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act of 2018 (H.R. 6510/S. 3172). Both bills will expedite maintenance projects and increase access to the nation's trails for recreational riders and other outdoor enthusiasts.

The RNR Act leverages taxpayer dollars by allowing the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to promote the role of volunteers in trail maintenance. The bill also cuts red tape by allowing the Department of Agriculture (USDA) and BLM to develop a "trail management plan" that assures uniform maintenance standards for trails managed by two different agencies. Whereas the RNR Act maximizes existing funds, the Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act (H.R. 6510/ S. 3172) establishes a new revenue stream to move forward with deferred maintenance projects. It would support National Park Service trails by diverting energy development revenues to a new public lands restoration fund dedicated to maintenance projects.

Status:

RNR Act - Since House Natural Resources Committee Chairman Rob Bishop (R-UT) introduced the RNR Act (H.R. 3400) in 2017, the chairman conducted a full committee hearing, resulting in passage of the legislation on April 18, 2018. Because the bill has passed the committee, House leadership has the discretion to schedule a vote on H.R. 3400 before the end of the year. The legislation currently has 12 bipartisan co-sponsors. On the Senate side, Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR) introduced a companion bill, S. 1633, which has won bipartisan co-sponsorships from Sens. Donnelly (D-IN), Ernst (R-IA), Tester (D-MT) and King (I-ME). Although leadership has referred the bill to the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, no hearings have been scheduled.

Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act – On September 12, the House Natural Resources Committee voted unanimously to pass H.R. 6510, underscoring the bi-partisan support behind the bill. On the Senate side, Sen. Rob Portman (R-OH) and Mark Warner (D-VA) have joined 24 senate colleagues to give momentum to the Restore Our Parks Act of 2018 (S. 3172). Introduced in late June, the bill has been referred to the Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

Take Action:

House Message: Tell your lawmaker to co-sponsor the RNR Act (H.R. 3400) and the Restore Our Parks and Public Lands Act (H.R. 6510), and push these bills across the finish line! Also, ask your representative to urge Speaker Ryan (R-WI) and Minority Leader Pelosi (D-CA) to schedule House floor votes on these important, bipartisan measures.

Senate Message: Tell your senators to join the list of co-sponsors of the RNR Act (S. 1633) and Restore Our Parks Act (S. 3172) to build support for these important bills that will promote recreational riding on the nation's trails! If your senators are already co-sponsors, thank them for their support and tell them to pass these important bills before the end of the year.