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## Ending Unfinished Business for our Horses

We have come a long way in Thoroughbred racing over the past several years. As an industry, we have introduced meaningful reforms that show how much we care about our horses, whether they are on the track or retiring to a new career. Examples include the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act (HISA), which will keep our racehorses safer, and aftercare initiatives such as the Thoroughbred Aftercare Alliance, the Thoroughbred Retirement Foundation, Thoroughbred Charities of America, and the Thoroughbred Incentive Program.

However, as we approach the final leg of the iconic Triple Crown races with the Belmont Stakes on Saturday, unfinished business still looms that affects not only our racehorses, but all horses in the United States: horse slaughter.

To end this business, we need Congress to pass the Save America's Forgotten Equines (SAFE) Act H.R.3355/S.2732, enacting a permanent ban on horse slaughter in the U.S. and ending the export of horses for slaughter abroad.

For years, advocates have worked with congressional leaders responsible for the annual Agriculture Appropriations bill to pass and maintain language that prohibits federal funding of USDA inspections of horse slaughter facilities. This effectively prevents the slaughter of horses for food on American soil, but our horses are still exported to slaughter plants in Canada and Mexico.

At auctions all around the country, middlemen for foreign-owned slaughter plants, known as kill buyers, purchase healthy horses that will bring the best price per pound. These kill buyers will bid against horse rescues and legitimate horse owners, often inflating prices. Kill buyers sometimes pose as "genuine" horse rescues or dealers and prey on unsuspecting members of the public, profiting from their last-minute "emergency" bids to save horses from slaughter. They also trick unsuspecting owners into selling their horses into the slaughter pipeline.

Many horses suffer terrible injuries during long distance transport, and at the slaughter plants, they rarely experience quick, painless deaths due to their anatomy and inherent flight response to danger. When horse slaughter was legal in the U.S. prior to being shut down in 2007, the USDA documented serious abuses to horses during transport to and while at the plants.

Horse slaughter is not humane euthanasia, nor is it a necessary evil. It is a reprehensible way to treat companion animals that have learned to put their trust in us. It is a predatory practice, and the single most effective way to shut it down would be prompt passage of the SAFE Act.

Much has been accomplished since forward-thinking members of the horse racing industry and animal welfare groups joined together to address shared concerns about the state of American horse racing. Most notable is the work to build support for successful passage of HISA in December 2020. This groundbreaking law led to the creation of an independent authority to oversee drug enforcement protocols and improve racetrack safety in horse racing. Support for our rehoming and retraining efforts are stronger than ever, too, even reaching other countries with initiatives such as the International Forum for the Aftercare of Racehorses.

However, horse slaughter is something we must address in our own country to make sure plants in the U.S. stay closed and to make sure that our horses don't leave our borders for the wrong reason. The end of horse slaughter will be a game changer, reinforcing as nothing else could the fact that we have both moral and practical responsibilities toward our horses. I am proud to see horse racing groups such as Breeder's Cup and The Stronach Group actively leading industry support for this bill. With more than 80% of Americans opposing the slaughter of horses, it is time that all of us join together to tell Congress to bring the SAFE Act across the finish line.

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