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December 1, 2014

The Honorable John A. Boehner, Speaker
United States House of Representatives
1011 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Boehner:

On behalf of the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), I respectfully urge you to bring the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act to the House floor for a vote before the 113th Congress adjourns.

Introduced by Representatives Ed Whitfield and Steve Cohen, H.R. 1518 has strong bipartisan support in Congress, with 306 cosponsors in the House and 60 in the Senate.

This legislation is desperately needed to end, once and for all, the cruel and inhumane practice of “soring,” which can cause irreversible negative effects or even death in America’s beautiful walking horses. The bill will amend the Horse Protection Act to designate additional unlawful acts, strengthen penalties for violation, and improve the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s enforcement capabilities.

Soring is the act of deliberately causing pain through chemical or physical means to exaggerate the leg motion of high-gaited horses, specifically Tennessee Walking Horses, Spotted Saddle Horses and Racking Horses. Despite the fact that these horses can be humanely trained to lift their legs faster and higher to achieve an accentuated gait, many trainers and owners believe they must use soring to be competitive in the show ring. That mentality is wrong, yet it is ingrained within the culture of the walking horse show industry.

Recognizing the harm that falls on these gentle creatures, Congress enacted the Horse Protection Act in 1970 with the goal of ending this cruel practice. Unfortunately, 40 years later, soring still continues in the show ring today at an alarming rate.

Earlier this year, for example, the USDA found that roughly 20 percent of all entries in the Tennessee Walking Horse Celebration, the largest annual U.S. walking horse show, were in violation of the Horse Protection Act. That means that one in every five horses entering into the arena showed signs of abuse. This is simply unacceptable.

The AVMA, the American Association of Equine Practitioners, and every state veterinary medical association in the country support H.R. 1518. It is also supported by countless veterinarians and even former walking horse industry leaders who have witnessed the pain and agony these horses must endure.

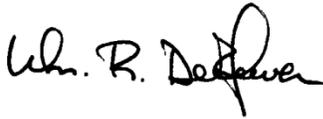
With 365 of our nation’s lawmakers already signaling their support for this bill, it is absolutely imperative that Congress take the final action to vote on and pass this bill into

law. Congress has the opportunity now to improve the USDA's ability to enforce against soring and punish violators of the law, so that hopefully, one day soon, soring will be a practice of the past. The industry has had the opportunity to change and has refused.

Our country's walking horses should be admired for their beautiful natural gait without living a life of mental and physical torture. Congress: the reins are in your hands now to take a stand against this egregious practice and protect the welfare of America's walking horses. Pass the PAST Act now!

If you would like additional information on preventing the inhumane practice of soring or other animal welfare issues, please contact Dr. Whitney Miller (202-289-3211, wmiller@avma.org).

Thank you for your consideration.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "W. Ron DeHaven". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

W. Ron DeHaven, DVM, MBA
CEO and Executive Vice President