

20

The Tipping Point



Fact

Time Is NOT
On Our Side
this Session

News of Interest 2

Updates on Wheelon Case
and Modest Proposals
from Shelbyville's Dave
Thomas

Roy Talks Reality 4

Asking "What about the
Horses?" Mr. Exum talks
about the results of the
mid-term elections

If you hear a ticking sound inside your head as November ends, it's not the result of tinnitus. Instead, that sound is the passing away of the hours that make up the days of the lame duck session for this year's do – as- little- as- possible Congress. The hard fought for PAST Act, which has more co-sponsors in the House and in the Senate than almost any other piece of legislation that has come before the legislative body that supposedly makes the laws under which our country is governed, is about to fall victim to something more insidious than the inability of the Congress to function. That something is the behind- the- scenes working of Congress, both House and Senate, where action on any issue can be kept from happening no matter what the expressed will of the people when a few powerful and obstructionist officials have promised a few of their well- heeled donors that a bill like PAST won't get a vote. Republicans all, Mitch McConnell, Lamar Alexander, Marsha Blackburn, Hal Rogers, John Boehner, the Tennessee delegation, with the exception of Steve Cohen, —take a bow. **You've done what you were paid to do and if no vote takes place you've done it superbly.**

True, the supporters of a "proud Tennessee tradition", as Lamar Alexander likes to describe the sore horse, were given the late in the season gift of a fig leaf for their perfidy, thanks to their friends at the Performance Show Horse Association based in the sore horse capital of the world, Shelbyville, Tennessee. PSHA, when discovering exactly how much momentum the PAST Act had generated and fearful that it might actually get a vote, submitted a complaint letter which started in motion an ethics investigation naming PAST sponsor Congressman Ed Whitfield of Kentucky largely because of the activities of his wife, who works for the HSUS Legislative Fund, in support of the bill. Although PSHA denied having done it, the letter has been released to the public and it clearly shows that PSHA was behind the allegation that resulted in an official report, which The Tennessean in Nashville described as "Complaint Complicates Soring Issue". Wayne Pacelle of the HSUS has vowed to continue the effort to end soring of show horses no matter what the outcome this session. Although Senator Claire McCaskill (D-MO) signed on to co-sponsor PAST in November, making the bill filibuster proof in the Senate, and Congressman Dave Brat (R-VA) fulfilled a campaign promise to his constituents, some of whom led the Walk on Washington, co-sponsoring in the House and meeting the Hastert Rule, no sign of a vote is forthcoming. What appears to be happening in 2014 to PAST be discouraging but keeping the anti-soring coalition together in 2015 is critical. The opposition is hoping that this setback will stop the movement. **Don't let them win in the end.**

Of note:

The Celebration has yet to pay prize money to winners of this year's events.

Results from the Celebration's VAC blood testing have not yet been received from the lab according to the industry.

Sound Horse Advocates may not be happy with the Congress but supporters of the performance horse aren't all that happy either with how things are progressing. The Tunica Horse Show had a dismal stake class and more barns are for sale in Tennessee.



Ready, set,
NEWS!

Local Shelbyville, Tennessee Businessman Dave Thomas writes about rebuilding the walking horse breed, which he equates to saving the walking horse show industry.

With a dawning realization that the USDA has the power to remove pads and chains and action devices under the law without additional legislation, Thomas offers a few "modest proposals" for what he thinks needs to happen.

Updates in the Wheelon Case

Blount County, Tennessee's Larry Wheelon has had activity in his felony case carried over on motions raised by his attorney, Rob White. His next appearance in court is scheduled for January 2015.

Meanwhile proceedings in the case against two of Wheelon's assistants and his blacksmith were heading to December 15th appearances. However, as a result of a November 22nd single vehicle accident, one of the defendants won't be participating in any more court related activities.

Brandon Lunsford, 33, of Maryville was ejected from the passenger seat of a truck in which he was riding, driven by a 20-year-old friend who lost control of the vehicle. The driver was critically injured while Lunsford was killed. Authorities said the crash occurred at about 2:45 a.m. The truck was northbound when the driver lost control on a right-hand curve, and the vehicle rotated counter-clockwise until it struck several trees on the passenger side of the truck, officials said.

Although Tennessee state law requires that occupants in a motor vehicle wear seat belts when a vehicle is in motion, neither of the men were wearing seat belts according to authorities.

Described in his obituary as a professional horse trainer, Lunsford continued to be employed at Wheelon Stables after the 2013 there which eventually resulted in indictments. His family requested that "As a tribute to his life and love of horses, those wishing to attend the memorial services please feel free to wear boots and blue jeans. Brandon's family wishes to express their deepest gratitude for the out-pouring of sympathy and acts of kindness related to his tragic and early passing."

In Part 3 of our series "Concerned Voices" I will lay out the ideas we have received concerning the rebuilding of the Walking Horse as a breed. I have received many emails, phone calls and personal visits. I have also talked with business consultants, public relations specialists, stakeholders, horse owners and long time trainers and exhibitors. In this process I received wide ranging thoughts and concerns. But, for the purpose of laying out constructive ideas I will present the most prominent and popular comments and suggestions.

Here are the most popular and agreed upon areas of concern.

1. UNITY- For the Walking Horse Breed to survive as a legitimate recognized horse breed there has to be an organized structure of unity and leadership. **Continued p.3**

Dave Thomas continued from page 2

70% of the respondents feel that the Tennessee Walking Horse Breeders and Exhibitors Association is the organization to do this. Suggestions on how to accomplish this task is wide ranging. Most feel that all parties have to agree that this breed is worth saving because of its natural abilities and versatility.

2. ENFORCEMENT OF THE HPA- The majority of respondents feel our current HIO system falls far short in enforcing the HPA and keeping the sore horse out of the show ring. Most feel that the inspection program cannot be overseen by industry insiders. The majority feel an independent outside organization should be in charge of inspections and enforcement. Nearly everyone agrees an organization like the USEF is needed.

3. REBRANDING OF THE BREED- Nearly all respondents are embarrassed to tell anyone they own a Tennessee Walking Horse. The stigma hanging over the breed has expanded across the globe. The next 3 items will expand on the rebranding of the TWH.

4. CHANGE IN SHOEING- 80% of those responding, the public relations experts and the business consultants all agree that the performance show package has to be reduced to a more eye appealing presentation. The most experienced public relations expert said, "The current visual statement made by the performance horse is offensive to the average horse person, even more so to non-horse people".

5. ELIMINATION OF CHAINS- Most agree that the chain around the ankle has to be changed in order to get our current stigma erased. Lots of people have suggested that the performance horse move to a light weight bell boot or small ankle ring.

6. RIDER TRAINING- This was a very popular topic and the talk surrounds the posture of many riders in the show ring. Most all agree that many of our riders present a bad image with their poor posture and total lack of horsemanship when in the saddle.

7. TRANSPARENCY- One of the public relations experts recommended that all efforts to enforce and regulate the rules HAD to be in a transparent format. The hiding behind the scenes has to stop in order to gain any credibility back with the general public.

The list could be much longer but I will stop with these 7.

On a personal note- The Walking Horse Industry is missing out on an area that could propel the Walking Horse breed into the future. That is a youth academy program. A few years ago this was attempted but not supported. If this industry is going to survive there MUST be a program to introduce this great breed to our children. At this year's Celebration and most other shows across the area there were hardly any youth participating. An Academy program works! Take a long look at the Saddlebred industry. Nearly every barn has an academy instructor to go along with their program. Most TWH trainers don't realize what an opportunity they are missing out on.

The problems are many and must be addressed immediately. Show season is over and there should be an expedited plan in place to save this breed. Unfortunately, only a few are willing to change and honestly discuss our REAL issues.

Those few will lead this breed into the future. The rest will fade away. Which one will you be?

Horse and Rider Magazine Makes Plea for PAST Act

Thanks to the persistent work of a Texas based advocate, the multi-breed national publication Horse and Rider ran a news brief in the issue now on the news stands encouraging people to contact their elected officials in support of the PAST Act.

This brought the issue of abuse in walking horse show rings to a new audience who might have been unaware that soring of horses continues today and that laws currently on the federal books are insufficient to stop it.

Note to Shelbyville Now: *This is one example of how you lead the breed into the future, Mr. Thomas. No one involved in the current fight to end soring plans to fade away and we do plan to save the breed with the first step changing the way it is shown.*

What About the Horses?

By Roy Exum Reprinted from [The Chattanooga](#)

As the midterm elections were being held across America on Tuesday, I wondered about the horses. It has been proven that the hideous soring of Tennessee Walkers continues in unabated fashion but absolutely nothing changed this week in the very state where it is the worst in the world. Every incumbent in Tennessee has just been reelected to Congress and now the disgraceful phalanx our so-called “representatives” will return to Washington.

Think about this: There are now 58 of 100 United States senators who are co-sponsors of the “Prevent All Soring Practices Act” that is currently log-jammed in Washington. In Congress, there are 304 of 435 members of Congress who are co-sponsoring a similar bill that would definitely strengthen the Horse Protection Act. While you would think “the majority rules,” the better belief is that neither bill now has much of a chance because Tennessee’s elected officials are actively blocking it.

To understand that, you need to know that only one person in Tennessee’s entire delegation to Washington supports the anti-soring legislation – Steve Cohen, a Democrat from Memphis. All the others have sided with Congresswoman Marsha Blackburn and Senator Lamar Alexander in a disgusting, watered-down legislation that benefits the disreputable “Big Lick” segment of the horse industry and casts a sadistic pall over the entire state.

Lamar Alexander’s state campaign chairman is Steven B. Smith, a known violator of the Horse Protection Act who heads the Breeders and Exhibitors Association for the “Big Lick.” Smith, also a prominent activist in state Republican circles, has allegedly used his influence and checkbook to coddle the state’s politicians who claim they work for “all the people” in Washington when, in fact, the great majority of Tennesseans are nauseated with the “Big Lick” and its shady followers.

The salvation, if it can be called that, is that soring and documented abuse is eating away at the walking horse industry like the most insidious cancer. The World “Celebration” in Shelbyville is now a money-losing joke, plagued by small crowds, no-show exhibitors and a scathing public perception. Walking horse owners are fleeing the “Big Lick” to the flat-shod movement and the number of horse shows that won’t allow horses with padded front hooves is growing.

Farms are for sale in “walking horse country” and trainers, who claim they can’t produce the grotesque unnatural gait without resorting to soring, are going out of business. At a time when the public is clamoring for Washington to produce jobs, lawmakers from Tennessee seem oblivious there is even a problem in what was once the state’s most-treasured industry. While it is abundantly clear that those who would defile an animal have no qualms about doing exactly the same to the breed, you can rest assured that jobs will continue to dry up in the once-teeming horse industry.



Saved from slaughter by the HSUS, still wearing his performance package when he was brought to the sale, today Dutch is on the mend. His feet , shown below in 2013 , will never look like this again. In this season of gratitude, Dutch, and all the others like him , would thank you if they could for all you have done this year to change the future for the horses who have not had such a happy ending.



The Final Word:

All of us who have been involved for many years in trying to end soring, abusive shoeing and biting practices, all forms of mechanical manipulation along with general bad riding and worse horsemanship found in the production of the big lick show horse, could look at the upcoming end of the Congressional session and wonder if anything was accomplished... take heart.

For the first time the majority of the dirty secrets of the industry are fully out in public. Major papers including USA Today, and the Internet have made it impossible to hide what really goes on in manufacturing a big lick horse. People know about it and they hate it. More than 19,000 people signed a petition to stop exhibition of these horses at the North Carolina State Fair in 2014.

The Celebration has lost the support of the public and it is never coming back. Awash in a sea of red ink and red faces, constantly trying to manufacture new strategies to change the focus from the real issue which is the abused show horse, empty seats at the 2014 event, tell the tale. This isn't entertainment.

The TWHBEA has shown itself with its by law changes to be not really a breed registry but an interest group that also registers horses with its interests vested firmly in Tennessee and surrounding southern states. People know it now and can start looking for new venues to register horses and to promote the natural, versatile Walking Horse as it should be promoted.

The PAST Act may not get passed this session but what has been done, and what can continue to be done in the coming year by ordinary people will be worth doing.

Remember: Never Quit Five Minutes Before the Miracle!