

Testimony on behalf of the

National Cattlemen's Beef Association

With regard to

HR 503 – The American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act

Submitted to the

United States House of Representatives – Committee on Agriculture

The Honorable Bob Goodlatte, Chairman

Submitted by

Paxton Ramsey

Member

National Cattlemen's Beef Association
Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association

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Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, good morning, my name is Paxton Ramsey. I am a rancher and horseman from Devers, Texas, and it is my honor and pleasure to be here today to talk about HR 503.

Horses have been an important part of ranching in that they help us in our daily activities and have played a crucial role in developing the U.S. cattle business into what it is today. These horses are our tools, our companions, and in my opinion, one of God's masterpieces. With that said, I can assure you that I give them the utmost respect, care, and attention they deserve. Besides starting our family ranch in 1904, my great-grandfather was also involved in the horse industry. He made a name for himself as he broke horses for Roosevelt's Rough Riders and started what became a 200 head band of mares in my grandfather's generation that were well known for their ability to make good ranches into great ranches. Today, we have downsized to roughly 60 head due to the modern day expenses of appropriate healthcare for horse herds of large numbers. Unfortunately, we must recognize that not all horse owners are passionate nor are they responsible in caring for these animals. Many horses become lame, sick, no longer usable as they once were, unmanageable or unruly. Sally Ramsey, my aunt, was killed by just such a horse on her ranch in Junction, Texas in

1991. Not a pleasant experience, I assure you. These are just a few of the reasons that a horse may become unwanted and dealt with in a humane fashion.

First and foremost, we have to remember that the processing of horses is just one of many different management options for owners to consider. Other options include adoption, rehabilitation, donation, and private purchase. This brings up a good point – the money received for a processed horse is roughly a tenth or less of what its value would be as a usable horse. I am sure that in many cases, a horse sold for processing is sold under these conditions because the owner has exhausted all other options. Contrary to popular belief, there is not a group of thieves running around, stealing horses in the night and slaughtering them for huge profits. These processing plants are strictly regulated by USDA and in the case of my home state of Texas, brand inspectors are on hand to ensure that the horses are not stolen. Since 1997, by mandate of the Texas Legislature, Texas and Southwestern Cattle Raisers Association has stationed inspectors at the two horse slaughter plants in Texas to inspect, identify, oversee, and ensure that horse thieves are unable to utilize these plants as an effective place of business. These law enforcement investigative efforts not only deter theft, but also pursue and prosecute the offenders in their jurisdiction. In 2005, TSCRA recovered or

accounted for 40 missing and stolen horses with an average of 100 annually over the last 10 years. A perfect example of this occurred this summer when a roping horse was stolen from the Saginaw rodeo arena, just two miles from the Fort Worth plant, but was successfully recovered by TSCRA's Field Inspection Team.

I am afraid that eliminating the processing of horses as a management option will actually pose a risk to horse welfare. Without the ability to recapture even a small value from their sale of an unwanted horse, some horse owners will spend no money to properly euthanize and dispose of these animals. That unwanted horse, under these conditions, will now begin a slow and painful neglect, starvation, and/or painful process that is sure to end with a very unnecessarily inhumane death. My wife Erica is a Veterinarian in Baytown, Texas, and has been called in as a witness on a neglect case. She hopes to never do it again.

You have heard the horse welfare and veterinary experts talk today about their concerns on how to address the 70,000 horses a year that will require care, its costs, the unintended mistreatment of these animals in non-regulated rescue facilities, and the environmental concerns of disposing of carcasses. We agree with these experts because HR 503 fails to address any

of these issues. Somebody, somewhere, is going to have to pay for the care of these animals, and more than likely, that will be the American taxpayer.

An additional concern of mine, as both a rancher and horseman, is the dangerous fact that this bill is solely based on emotion. The groups supporting HR 503 have had to resort to playing on peoples' emotions because they know that they have absolutely no factual basis to ban the processing of horses. Horse processing is regulated by USDA under the Humane Slaughter Act, and faces all of the scrutiny and inspections that other livestock processing plants do. Though it is not illegal nor is it inhumane, the overall thought of horses being processed for food is not appealing to me nor is it to the general public. However, the alternative will most certainly be a cruel, gruesome, and a costly experience, especially for the horses at stake. The opposition talks about horses being mistreated while in transport to processing plants, mistreatment in the plants, and accuses plants of willingly taking in stolen horses. There are already laws that address these issues, and if they need to be better enforced, so be it, but let's not confuse the enforcement of laws with the emotions that surround them. Leaving the law in the hands of the emotional is a very slippery slope, and one that will affect all of agriculture

One thing we must keep in mind is the availability of choice. We have a choice in how to manage our horses, and should be allowed these choices due simply to the fact that these horses are our private property. I firmly believe that it is Congress' place to put laws into effect that regulate the way livestock can be treated, and penalize those who abuse animals, but not to regulate how I manage my property when the options I choose from are humane and based on sound animal production practices.

I appreciate the Committee's leadership in tackling this tough issue, and I look forward to seeing each of you vote this bill down. This affects my business and the business of many others with no sound basis, not to mention the American employees at these plants who will lose their jobs. As a horseman, I truly appreciate the oppositions' affection for horses, but I would encourage them to redirect their energies by rolling up their sleeves and personally rescuing as many of these horses as they can, rather than manipulating Congress with no logical future plans. These types of actions will most certainly create much larger problems than the ones we are addressing here today.

I thank you for your time and the opportunity to express my views this morning and I, along with my fellow ranchers, look forward to working with you to defeat HR 503.