



October 24, 2023

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

RE: Live Export of Horses for Slaughter for Human Consumption

Dear President Biden:

In recent weeks, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced his support for legislation to ban the live export of horses for slaughter for human consumption. The legislation aims to halt the practice of packing heavy draft horses into shipping crates for a long journey by air to Japan, where they are slaughtered and butchered. Their meat is served as raw sashimi at high-end sushi restaurants. The entire process is both harrowing, inhumane, and frightening for the horses, and Prime Minister Trudeau and Parliament have stated emphatically that it's time to protect Canada's equines from an unacceptably cruel trade.

Sadly, in the United States, where polling revealed that 83 percent of Americans strongly oppose the slaughter of our equines for human consumption, a predatory, disreputable industry continues to prey on equines for a foreign industry that is singularly responsible for the worst assaults on horses. That opposition has played a role in diminishing the scale of the abuse; the number of American equines exported to Canada and Mexico for slaughter has dropped from 150,000 a year a decade ago to about 20,000 in 2022.

As graphically illustrated in an [investigative report](#) earlier this year by the Center for a Humane Economy and Animals' Angels, kill buyers acquire horses by dishonest and deceptive means, often bidding up prices to extort higher prices from rescues or families who seek to save horses from shipping to slaughter. Elderly, sick, blind, and lame horses, heavily pregnant mares, small ponies, and aggressive stallions are all crammed onto trailers for a horrific journey to foreign meat plants. Horses and other equines are neglected and abused at every turn of this winding journey.

As a U.S. Senator and as Vice President, you opposed horse slaughter. Yet, your Administration has been silent on this trade. I do hope that Prime Minister Trudeau's outspoken work on this subject reminds you that this subject is worthy of the attention of all North American heads of state.

We urge you to make a statement recognizing the merits of Prime Minister Trudeau’s declaration and indicate that you support the United States ending its role in the live-export of horses for slaughter to Canada and Mexico. While U.S. live-exports are all by ground and not air transport, our trade is far bigger by raw numbers, so our animal welfare problems are even more acute than our neighbor’s.

Democrats appear to be unanimous in supporting the Save America’s Forgotten Equines (SAFE) Act, H.R. 3475 and S. 2037, which have bipartisan leadership in both chambers and deep support among rank-and-file Republicans, too. This bill amends the 2018 Dog and Cat Meat Trade Prohibition Act, which banned the trade in dog and cat meat for human consumption, by adding the words “or equines,” thus ensuring that our three most treasured animal companion species – dogs, cats, and horses – are protected from foreign interests that regard them as little more than a food commodity. Just as the dog and cat meat legislation was added as an amendment to the 2018 Farm Bill, the SAFE Act is being offered as an amendment to the 2023 Farm Bill currently pending before Congress.

In America, horses are our companions and partners in recreation, sport, and work. They have not and have never been a commercially relevant food source for American consumers during the entire span of our republic. Even when we had operational horse slaughter plants in the United States – before the key states and Congress shut down the final three plants in 2007 – it was exclusively an export trade. This trade in horses for slaughter is perhaps America’s most reviled form of structural cruelty to equines. We hope you’ll take a public stand on this issue and guide Agriculture Secretary Vilsack to take action on the issue in an appropriate way for him and the USDA.

Thank you for your service and your past support for animal welfare. Animal welfare is also a present concern for the nation, and we hope you reactivate on the subject.

Sincerely,

Katherine Heigl
Actress/Founder
Jason Debus Heigl Foundation

James Gagliano
President & COO
The Jockey Club

Wayne Pacelle
President
Center for a Humane Economy

Tom Rooney
CEO & President
National Thoroughbred Racing Association
Member of Congress (2009-2019)

David O’Rourke
President & CEO
The New York Racing Association

Scott Beckstead
Director of Campaigns
Animal Wellness Action
Oregon Racing Commission, Member