

Year End Spending Bill Includes Animal Wellness Victories, but \$21 Million in Funding for Mass Removals of Wild Horses

WASHINGTON, DC, USA, December 17, 2019 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The Congress is poised to pass a massive Fiscal Year 2020 spending package with a series of pro-animal provisions, many pushed by Animal Wellness Action, the Animal Wellness Foundation, and other animal welfare organizations. The House should vote on the \$1.4 trillion measure today, and the Senate is expected to follow suit and send the bill to the President by the end of the week.

The bill includes the Rescuing Animals with Rewards (RAWR) Act, authorizing a rewards program through the State Department to crack down on wildlife trafficking. That measure passed both chambers previously, so the inclusion of the measure is no surprise. It is the second free-standing animal protection bill that will become law in the 116th Congress, following the enactment of the Preventing Animal Cruelty and Torture Act, which the President signed earlier this month.

The spending bill directs USDA to restore animal welfare inspection reports and Horse Protection violations on its website – a reversal of an adverse USDA action that the agency took at the beginning of the tenure of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue. In February 2017, the agency all but eliminated the public's ability to view inspection reports related to the Animal Welfare Act and Horse Protection Act, including the treatment of animals in commercial dog breeding operations ("puppy mills"), research laboratories, zoos, and Walking horse shows.

The bill also urges the pertinent agencies to more aggressively enforce animal welfare laws. There is strong language directing the Department of Justice (DOJ) to "make it a priority to investigate and prosecute violations of animal welfare laws," and requires the Agency to provide a report within 120 days regarding the specific steps the DOJ is taking to enforce such laws. The Animal Wellness Foundation and Animal Wellness Action have made enforcement of our animal fighting, horse protection, and other anti-cruelty laws a top priority and have launched a nationwide campaign to enforce the laws related to cockfighting and dogfighting, including a \$2,500 reward program for tips leading to a conviction. The Parity in Animal Cruelty Enforcement



Wild Horse Helicopter Roundup

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(PACE) Act, which extends the federal animal fighting laws to the U.S. Territories, takes effect this Friday, December 20th.

AWA is disappointed that the Congress, in this bill, has conditionally provided \$21 million in new monies to the Bureau of Land Management for wild horse and burro management, but there are some safeguards in the legislation that may forestall even larger round-ups that had been called for by the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and the Humane Society of the U.S. AWA lobbied against a joint plan by those groups that would start the agency on plan to round up 130,000 horses over the next decades, depopulating wild horses and subjecting them to inhumane round-ups. We'll be closely following BLM's actions and lobbying against mass round-ups. As with so many other matters brought up in this bill, the provision included on wild horses and burros is hardly the last word on the subject.



Wild horses held captive in BLM holding facilities

"Once again, despite a strongly divided Congress, lawmakers took positive steps to protect animals, underscoring that protecting animals is a bipartisan concern," noted Holly Gann, director of federal affairs for the Animal Wellness Foundation. "While we are glad to see provisions to prioritize enforcement of the animal fighting law, funding to protect domestic violence victims and their pets, and a continued ban on horse slaughter, much more is needed to crackdown on animal cruelty crimes to protect animals and our communities."

Here is a summary of other key provisions:

- \$2 million for a grant program to help domestic violence shelters accommodate pets. The program was authorized in the Pet and Women Safety (PAWS) Act, which AWA and AWF worked to get signed into law last year.
- Defunding of horse slaughter inspections, effectively ensuring that slaughter plants won't start operations in the U.S. The permanent solution, however, is the Safeguard American Food Exports (SAFE) Act, which would ban horse slaughter in the U.S. and stop the export of horses for slaughter for human consumption. Passage of this bill is an AWA and AWF priority.
- Language on trophy hunting, directing the Fish and Wildlife Service to re-examine its policy regarding the importation of sport-hunted trophies from elephants and lions.
- Funding for enforcement of the Horse Protection Act at \$1,000,000 – a twenty percent plus increase. This funding enables USDA to enforce federal laws against "horse soring" – a cruel practice where Tennessee Walking, Racking, and Spotted Saddle horses are painfully tortured to achieve a high-stepping gait in horse shows.
- A long-standing restriction on issuing permits to Class B dealers who sell dogs and cats for use in research, protecting our dogs and cats from these predators.
- \$500,000 in funding to address pentobarbital in pet food. Pentobarbital is a drug used to euthanize animals and was found in numerous pet foods.

“This is not a revolutionary bill for animal welfare by any means, but it continues the trend of slowly ramping up pressure on executive agencies and providing new funding for them to enforce our federal laws against animal cruelty, it directs USDA to reverse its outrageous take-down of inspection records on regulated animal use facilities, and it addresses wildlife trafficking and trophy hunting in constructive ways,” said Wayne Pacelle, founder of Animal Wellness Action. “We remain deeply concerned about BLM’s wild horse and burro management program and this bill creates uncertainty about our government’s treatment of these animals in the year to come.”

AWA and AWF are disappointed that lawmakers did not see fit to include the Shark Fin Sales Elimination Act as a rider, given its broad bipartisan support. The House passed the measure with 310 votes this fall, and the House Commerce Committee passed it by a voice vote. We remain hopeful it will move as a free-standing bill or an amendment to a larger conservation or animal welfare package of measures.

The Animal Wellness Foundation (AWF) is a Los Angeles-based private charitable organization with a mission of helping animals by making veterinary care available to everyone with a pet, regardless of economic ability. We organize rescue efforts and medical services for dogs and cats in need and help homeless pets find a loving caregiver. We are advocates for getting veterinarians to the front lines of the animal welfare movement; promoting responsible pet ownership; and vaccinating animals against infectious diseases such as distemper. We also support policies that prevent animal cruelty and that alleviate suffering. We believe helping animals helps us all.

Animal Wellness Action (AWA) is a Washington, D.C.-based 501(c)(4) organization with a mission of helping animals by promoting legal standards forbidding cruelty. We champion causes that alleviate the suffering of companion animals, farm animals, and wildlife. We advocate for policies to stop dogfighting and cockfighting and other forms of malicious cruelty and to confront factory farming and other systemic forms of animal exploitation. To prevent cruelty, we promote enacting good public policies and we work to enforce those policies. To enact good laws, we must elect good lawmakers, and that’s why we remind voters which candidates care about our issues and which ones don’t. We believe helping animals helps us all.

Marty Irby
ANIMAL WELLNESS ACTION
2028215686

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