

American Horse Racing Still at a Crossroads on Derby Day

LOUISVILLE, KENTUCKY, USA, April 30, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- By [Marty Irby](#), executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C. who was named one of The Hill's Top Lobbyists for 2020, and honored by Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth, II for his work to protect horses.

Saturday evening's call to post marks the running the 147th Kentucky Derby at Churchill Downs in Louisville, and for the first time in decades all of the horses will be running without Lasix, a diuretic that's been rampantly misused as a performance-enhancing drug in

racing since the 1980's. Reformers in the industry successfully achieved the ban on Lasix at the Derby through the adoption of Kentucky state regulations that came just prior to Congressional enactment of the Horseracing Integrity and Safety Act (HISA). Animal Wellness Action's (AWA)

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*Marty Irby, executive director
at Animal Wellness Action*

leaders worked on that legislation for six years and when AWA formed, we made it a top priority. Then President Trump signed the measure into law in late December – the first new federal horse protection since the enactment of the Wild and Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act in 1971.

HISA relied on a coalition of animal advocates and horse racing industry reforms. It would not have been secured without industry buy-in and leadership from The Jockey Club, Water, Hay, Oats Alliance (WHOA), The Breeders' Cup,

Keeneland, the New York Racing Association (NYRA), and others. That coalition prompted Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., and their House counterparts, Reps. Paul Tonko, D-N.Y., (who represents Saratoga, home to one of the oldest tracks in the U.S.), and Andy Barr, R-Ky., (who represents Lexington – the “Horse Capital of the



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World”).

The new legislation won't take effect until mid-2022, and there's much work to do to make sure the anti-doping standards are honored and, once the measure takes full legal effect, that it's enforced. In the meantime, horses are still dying on tracks across America – nearly 100 so far this year.

The issue has been elevated this week by reporting from USA Today and the Louisville Courier Journal, in a story titled “It's so easy to cheat': Is horse racing finally getting serious about drug misuse?”

There's already a backlash among horse industry players who are addicted to doping. Some players, led by rogue horse trainers, as well as Oklahoma tracks and its state Attorney General are suing to invalidate the law. Some of the truly substandard tracks in the U.S. simply cannot fathom a future without doping, since they see horses as little more than commodities on the hoof. If they don't perform well, what's the point?

We are confident that the federal courts will uphold the law.

But in the meantime, our corporate engagement arm – The Center for a Humane Economy – is keeping our hands on the reins and driving the conversation on the issue in the private for-profit sector. This year we've been focused on shining light on the 10 horses who died on one of the most dangerous tracks in the U.S., in Charles Town, West Virginia, operated by the publicly traded Penn National Gaming Inc. The Associated



Animal Wellness Action Executive Director Marty Irby



Hall of Fame Jockey Chris McCarron with Animal Wellness Action Executive Director Marty Irby in Saratoga Springs on Saturday Discussing Horse Protection Issues

Press spotlighted the first deaths in February, and WDVM in the greater D.C., Virginia, Maryland metro area joined us in unveiling an expose on Charles Town last month.

You see, it's not just doping that's at issue in U.S. horseracing – horse slaughter, and the archaic use of the whip must be addressed as well. The betting public will no longer tolerate the abuse of these horses. This isn't ancient Rome, with games at the Colosseum and Circus Maximus; it's 2021, and the Charles Town track has become well known for its harsh and unforgiving treatment of horses. We're pressing Penn National that operates Hollywood Casino in Charles Town, to turn this ship around or shut down. Penn National must improve its track surfaces, implement a ban on whipping, and enact new policies that protect American racehorses from ending up dead on the track or consigned to the slaughter pipeline to be served up on foreign dinner plates.

While the call to post is sounded this weekend, we hope you'll join us in the call to action and [sign our petition](#) asking them to support the reforms outlined above. Horses are at the center of their business, and they should not be an afterthought when it comes to their health, safety, and welfare.

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