

Live Display of Show Horse Abuse Ongoing This Weekend Perpetuated by the Humane Society of the U.S.

The Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration Long Plagued by 'Soring' is Set to Crown its 83rd World Grand Champion on Saturday Night

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-- By [Marty Irby](#), Animal Wellness Action

It's showtime again in Shelbyville, a phrase you'll likely hear announcer Mark Farrar shout at the Tennessee Walking Horse National Celebration

(Celebration) that's set to crown its 83rd World Grand Champion (WGC) on Saturday night. The 2021 World Grand Championship will likely be won by one of the two contenders who captured the preliminary World Championships last Saturday – Rodney Dick and 'Really Coach' or Tyler Baucom and 'Minor Ordeal.'

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*Marty Irby, executive director
at Animal Wellness Action*



"Big Lick" Stacked Shoes and Ankle Chains Utilized on Tennessee Walking Horses

But unfortunately, many of the trainers competing in the event have long records of violating the [Horse Protection Act](#) (HPA) that was designed to stamp out the painful practice of soring – the intentional infliction of pain to horses' feet and legs by applying caustic chemicals such as kerosene, mustard oil, or other caustic substances or by inserting sharp objects into the horses' hooves to induce an artificial high step known as the "Big Lick."

The Big Lick is quite a different look than that performed by the first World Grand Champion, Strolling Jim, crowned in 1939, who wore nothing more than a regular pair of horse shoes on his front feet, and exhibited the sound, smooth, natural gait that made the walking horse famous. But for decades, every World Grand Champion has been allowed to show and compete with

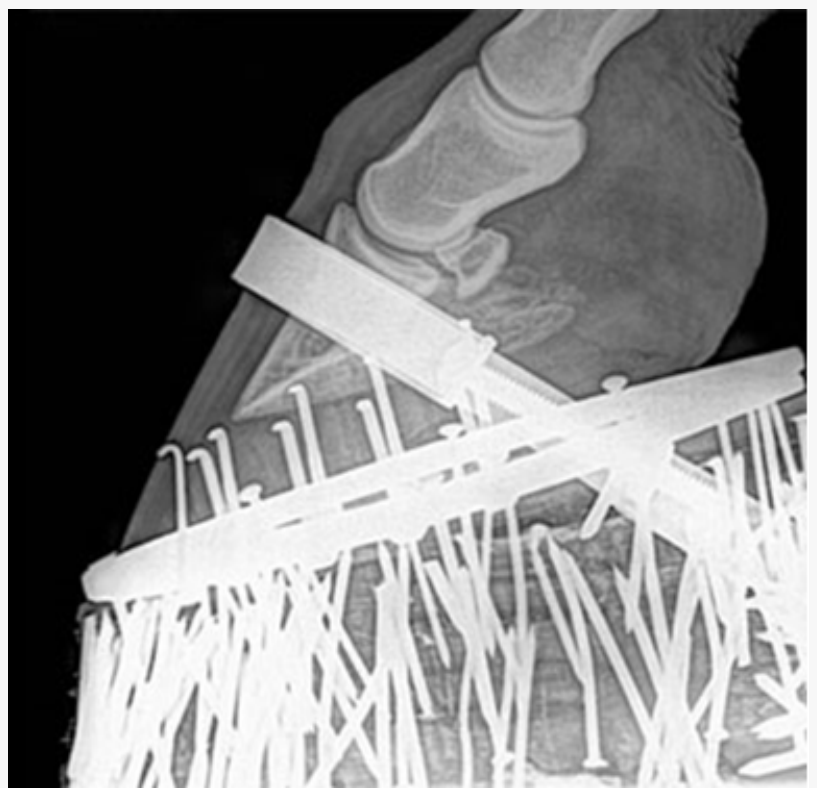
large-stacked shoes as tall as 8-10 inches on their feet, and metal ankle chains around their pasterns – devices used to exacerbate the pain caused by soring.

And 2021 would have been the last Celebration in history where the large-stacked shoes and ankle chains were worn if it weren't for the Humane Society of the U.S. (HSUS) and Humane Society Legislative Fund (HSLF) whose leaders intentionally torpedoed an effort to enact anti-soring legislation because the compromise didn't mirror all the provisions of the Prevent All Soring Tactics (PAST) Act. That bill failed to win support for 9 straight years, and there's no chance of that changing anytime soon.

The compromise – hard fought, with leaders of the Walking Horse industry finally assenting to change their ways – would eliminate chains on the horses' ankles and require a dramatic reduction in the size of the stack shoes that make Walking Horse shows look medieval. The measure also makes soring a federal felony, ends a self-policing scheme, and bans using tail braces that hold the horses tail in a U-shaped position after the ligaments have been severed – all for a certain look.

Leaders at Animal Wellness Action have worked to enact the PAST Act since 2012 when it was first introduced in the U.S. House. We like its provisions, but the bill cannot pass in its current form. You legislate based not on your hopes, but by counting votes and understanding where legislative roadblocks exist.

The PAST Act only achieved passage through the House in July of 2019 as result of changing the

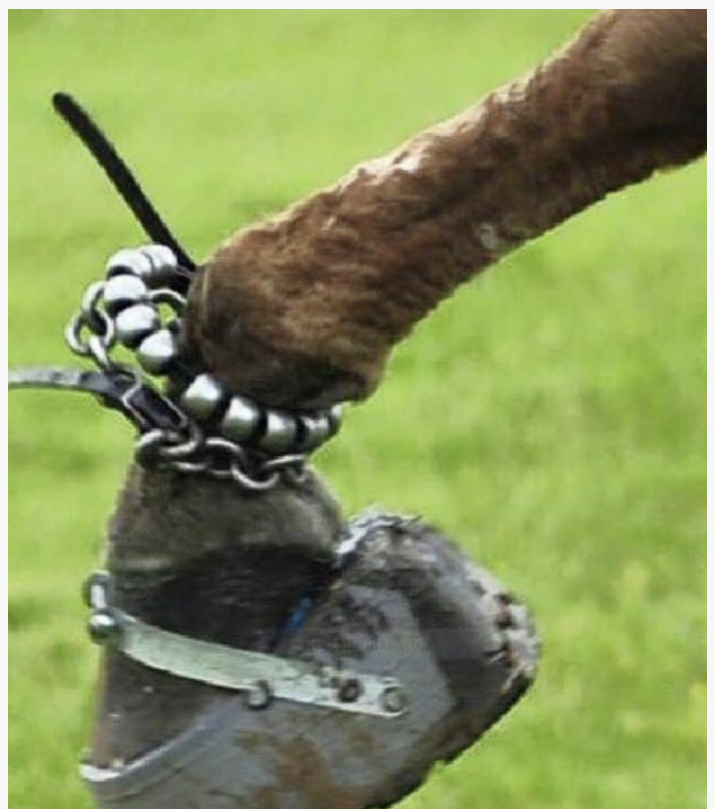


1992 Tennessee Walking Horse 2-Year-Old World Grand Champion JFK | Photo Credit: David Pruett

bill's name to the U.S. Senator Joseph D. Tydings Memorial PAST Act to honor the late Senator who authored the HPA and passed away in 2018. This was a strategy we developed with the Tydings family and the Citizens' Campaign Against Big Lick Animal Cruelty – not the HSUS or HSLF. The measure – led by the two veterinarians in Congress at the time – Reps. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore., and Ted Yoho, R-Fla. – cleared the House by a vote of 333 to 96, but with opposition from Senators who hailed from Tennessee and Kentucky and 96 House Republicans opposing it, the bill was dead on arrival in the Upper Chamber. In light of that circumstance we pulled together representatives still involved in [the breed](#) to form those revisions to the PAST Act that would have ensured the bill became law. Had it been enacted at the end of 2020, it would have taken effect this November.

The House and Senate have the votes to pass the PAST Act, but almost every animal bill has to secure consensus in the Senate to pass, and we don't have that on the PAST Act. In light of that political reality, we at Animal Wellness Action sat down with the industry and worked to secure a compromise that finally would end horse soring in America. The Horse Protection Act of 1970, which was a monumental achievement more than a half century ago, has proved too weak to stop soring. That's why we need a fortification of the law that can be enacted, so we can finally end soring.

The compromise effort garnered support from Monty Roberts, "the Man Who Listens to Horses;" Mark Miller, the lead singer of the band Sawyer Brown who used to own walking horses; the family of former Joseph Tydings, who was the author of the Horse Protection Act in 1970; SPCA International; and dozens of equine and animal protection groups. And the effort



Animal Wellness Action Executive Director
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was building steam until HSUS and HSLF decided to act as obstructionists and allow the current inhumane soring practices to fester.

While the old PAST Act has been reintroduced this year by Sens. Mike Crapo, R-Ida., and Mark Warner, D-Va., it's simply a messaging bill at this stage in the game, blocked by a handful of Senators from the region where soring occurs most, and there's no end in sight.

The sabotaging of the solid compromise legislation in 2020 is regrettable, but we hope that stakeholders will come together and work through the differences to make changes that will enable the bill to clear the Senate and become law. The Humane Society's opposition to compromise has only insured one thing: horses will continue to be sored indefinitely.

Marty Irby is the executive director at Animal Wellness Action in Washington, D.C., and an 8-time World Champion equestrian who was named as one of The Hill's Top Lobbyists for 2019 and 2020, and was recently honored by Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth, II for his work to protect horses. Follow him on Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook @MartyIrby.

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