

CHARLES W. STENHOLM

17TH DISTRICT
TEXAS

2409 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-8605
FAX: (202) 225-2934

Home Page: <http://www.house.gov/stenholm/>

AGRICULTURE COMMITTEE
RANKING MEMBER

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

P.O. Box 1237
STAMFORD, TX 79553
(325) 773-3623
FAX: (325) 773-2633

1500 INDUSTRIAL BOULEVARD, #101
ARLINGTON, TX 79802
(325) 673-7221
FAX: (325) 676-9547

2121 KNICKERBOCKER ROAD, SUITE A
SAN ANGELO, TX 76904
(325) 942-8881
FAX: (325) 942-9808

September 29, 2003

Mr. John R. Murrell
President
Three M Oil Company
8350 North Central Expressway
Suite G100
Dallas, Texas 75206

Dear Mr. Murrell,

Thank you for contacting me again with your concerns regarding H.R. 857, the American Horse Slaughter Prevention Act. I appreciate your attention to this matter and am always glad to share my views with you. I value your opinion and am grateful for this opportunity to respond.

I expect we are both well aware that there are thousands of horses in the US that are unwanted because they are no longer useful, and in some cases are even dangerous. I certainly understand a desire to protect these animals from inhumane treatment. That's something I have been doing for decades with my support for full enforcement of the Animal Welfare Act, among other things. However, I believe that a simple ban on the processing of horses for food will not solve the problem of unwanted horses nor encourage their humane treatment. Along with a number of prominent breed associations, like the American Quarter Horse Association, I believe that HR 857 might actually increase or prolong the suffering of many unfortunate horses. Consequently, I do not expect that I will support HR 857 should it move out of the Livestock and Horticulture Subcommittee, where it is currently being considered.

I hope you will let me take this opportunity to further explain my understanding of the somewhat complicated nuances this bill. I realize that several presumably well-intentioned organizations are actively pushing this legislation. However, I think they fail to understand the full implications of what they are trying to do.

First, HR 857 will not prevent a single horse from being killed and disposed of, if that is what the owner wishes. H.R. 857 will merely ensure that horses are no longer killed for human consumption in USDA inspected facilities under the strict guidelines of the Animal Welfare Act and the Humane Slaughter Act. If a person wants to dispose of an unwanted horse they will still be able to kill the horse and send it to rendering or dispose of it on-farm. Nothing about that reality will change under HR 857. Only, were HR 857 enacted, there would no longer be the possibility of the animal at least being killed in a venue where a USDA inspector is present to ensure that it is put down humanely. Given that the cost to have a horse put down by a private

veterinarian is around \$100.00 to \$150.00, I think it unlikely that many unwanted horses will receive that kind of humane euthanasia, especially given the reduced value of animals at rendering relative to slaughter plants. And since animals are not accepted alive at rendering plants, I will leave it to your imagination to suppose how and under what circumstances their lives may then be ended, should HR 857 be enacted into law.

Second, even if I set aside my animal welfare concerns, I do not believe it is the federal government's place to say that it should be illegal to consume horsemeat, even if I find it personally repulsive. Nor do I think that the federal government should be involved in deciding which livestock can be eaten and which cannot. It is the government's job to ensure that all livestock are treated humanely, regardless of breed or class, but not to decide which ones folks can or cannot eat.

I'm sure you are well aware that there are millions of Americans who think cattle and sheep should not be eaten either. What defensible, logically consistent arguments could I put forward for why it should be illegal for folks to process horsemeat (a traditional meat source in many cultures) but okay for us to slaughter and consume beef or lamb? Legislative consistency alone makes me very hesitant to advance such a law.

Finally, it is important to note that the percentage of horses that actually are slaughtered for human consumption has been decreasing rapidly over the past years, without any federal intervention. The number of horses processed in the U.S., or exported to Canada for processing, decreased from 263,000 in 1992 to 62,000 in 2001, and should be well below 50,000 this year. Given recent legal actions in Texas, this decline is only likely to accelerate in the coming year or two. As such, it seems that this issue may well be resolved to your satisfaction fairly soon through more appropriate state, local and economic influences.

Again, I do want to thank you for contacting me with your concerns and views on HR 857. It is out of respect for you, as one of my constituents, that I have tried to respond in a frank and forthright manner, knowing that my response may not be what you might wish to hear. Regardless, I truly appreciate knowing your views. It is the free exchange of thoughts and ideas between us that allows me to most appropriately represent you. Please do also be assured that I will continue to think about your comments if this issue ever moves forward out of Subcommittee.

With warm regards, I remain

Sincerely yours,



Charles W. Stenholm
Member of Congress