

NCSL SUPPORTS THE HORSE INDUSTRY

The National Council of State Legislatures (NCSL) is a bipartisan organization that serves the legislators and staffs of the nation's 50 states, its commonwealths and territories, and as such is a respected and effective advocate for the interests of the states before Congress and federal agencies. At their annual Fall Forum in Atlanta, Georgia on December 11-13, 2008, with an overwhelming majority of the states in support—NCSL adopted a Horse Industry policy resolution co-sponsored by Representative Sue Wallis of Wyoming, and Representative Dave Sigdestad of South Dakota.

The Horse Industry Policy urges Congress to oppose legislation that would restrict the market, transport, processing, or export of horses, to recognize the need for humane horse processing facilities in the United States, and not to interfere with State efforts to establish facilities in the United States. The passage of the policy provides the authority for NCSL staff in Washington D.C. to lobby on Capitol Hill as it effectively establishes the position of the States.

Rep. Wallis is a Vice Chair of the Agriculture and Energy Standing Committee at NCSL. "We have received an absolute flood of support from literally every crook and cranny of this nation, and from all walks of life," said Wallis, "we had letters of support from Horse Councils nation-wide, we heard from horse owners, horse rescue and recovery organizations who are over-whelmed and without options, breed registries, professional rodeo cowboys, horse owners and many, many people who are sincerely concerned about the fate of horses and the equine industry. I am especially pleased," said Wallis, "that the strong support of this resolution will allow our NCSL staff the ability to lobby on Capitol Hill with factual, accurate, and compassionate information about the horrific unintended consequences of certain proposed federal actions that would deprive livestock owners of private property rights, and thwart state efforts."

Besides countless emails and phone calls, letters of support, petitions, and resolutions from organizations, Sigdestad and Wallis made good use of solid academic resources—in particular, Dr. Patricia Evans, Equine Specialist from Utah State University and her work on the "State of the Horse Industry Since the Closure of the Processing Plants," and a graduate paper presented by Ashton Graham from New Mexico State University, "Wild Horses and Federal Tax Dollars."

Former US Senator Conrad Burns of Montana was in Atlanta to assist Sigdestad and Wallis and was instrumental in getting the resolution out of the Agriculture and Energy Committee, and onto the General Session floor for debate. The committee vote was nearly unanimous with a single dissenting vote from Rep. McCoy of Washington. "The horse people of America owe a special thanks not only to Rep. Sigdestad who first brought the issue to NCSL; and to Senator Burns for his straight-forward effectiveness; but also to the many state senators and representatives who supported the resolution at our General Session—especially Rep. Steve Riggs of Kentucky who spoke in support," says Wallis, "without question, animal agriculture in the US is under siege by radical animal rights organizations—this doesn't win us the war, but it is a significant skirmish, and we have one more valuable tool in our arsenal"