

Good morning. My name is Patrick Battuello, and I am the founder and president of the non-profit organization Horseracing Wrongs. I am here today to advocate what I freely admit to be an extreme position, but one, I believe, that is fully warranted by the facts, and, more important, dictated by morality. And that is, that horseracing in NYS, horseracing in America, has run its course – that horseracing must end. For far too long this industry has been given cover under the banner of sport – indeed, “The Sport of Kings” – when, in fact, stripped to its core, it is nothing but an archaic, largely nonviable gambling business that exploits, abuses, and kills sentient beings, *inherently*. In other words, it cannot be fixed or reformed; in other words, it is wrong from the start.

Horseracing is unremitting confinement and isolation: The typical racehorse is kept locked – alone – in a tiny 12×12 stall for over 23 hours a day, making a mockery of the industry claim that horses are born to run, love to run, and a cruelty all the worse for being inflicted upon naturally social, herd-oriented animals like horses.

Horseracing is control and subjugation – it is lip tattoos, cribbing collars, nose chains, tongue ties, mouth bits, and *whips*.

Horseracing is commodification: In the eyes of the law, racehorses are literal chattel – things to be bought, sold, traded, and dumped whenever and however their people decide. To make matters worse, they are not even afforded the protections, woefully inadequate as most are, of animal-cruelty statutes, meaning a trainer or owner can grind his horse into the ground – yes, even to death – with virtual impunity. What’s more, the average racehorse will change hands several times over the course of his so-called career, adding anxiety and stress to an already anxious, stressful existence.

Horseracing is negation: Practically all the horse’s natural instincts and desires are thwarted, creating an emotional and mental suffering that is brought home with crystal clarity in the stereotypies and vices commonly

seen in confined racehorses – cribbing, weaving, bobbing, pacing, kicking, even self-mutilation. Says world-renowned equine behaviorist Dr. Nicholas Dodman: “Racehorses, with long periods of confinement and isolation, exhibit an unusually high prevalence of stereotypes. The suffering can be described by referencing the suffering of people in solitary confinement. A recently released man who had spent years in solitary said he sometimes felt anxiety, paranoia, panic, hallucinations etc. The only way he could help suppress the dysphoria was to walk back and forth in his cell until the line he walked was soaked in his sweat.”

And, of course, horseracing is killing: Since 2009, when the Gaming Commission’s database went live – which, incidentally, *only* came in the wake of outrage over Eight Belles and calls for greater transparency – over 1,300 racehorses have died at New York State tracks – an average of 137 every year. But those are just the ones we know about, the ones who died onsite. How many more of the “catastrophically injured” were euthanized back at their owner’s farm? How many more too-badly-damaged had to be put down after landing at rescues? How many more, still, killed at private training facilities? Nationally, Horseracing Wrongs, through our unprecedented FOIA reporting, has documented over 5,000 confirmed kills on U.S. tracks just since 2014. We estimate that over 2,000 horses are killed racing or training across America every year. *Over 2,000*. Imagine that.

And just to be clear, death on the track is neither clean nor tranquil: It is cardiovascular collapse, pulmonary hemorrhage, blunt-force head trauma; it is broken necks, crushed spines, ruptured ligaments, and shattered legs – occasionally shattered so severely that the limb remains attached to the rest of the body by skin or tendons only. One such horse was Heelbolt, who “broke down” in a 2009 race at Fair Grounds in Louisiana. An ESPN writer watched as the track vet went to work:

“[Heelbolt’s] eyes, once coldly fixed on the track, are teary and dilated. His breathing, once quick, has quickened even more. His coat, once shiny

from the pumping of oil and sweat glands, has dulled. Out comes the pink [the euthanasia solution]. [The vet] strokes his neck to say good-bye...then puts her left index finger on his jugular and presses down, swelling the vein. She drives the needle straight into his jugular, piercing his sweaty, leathery skin, and depresses the large plunger with her thumb, pushing in the poison, darkening the pink as it mixes with blood. After it empties, she draws out the needle and repeats the motion with the second syringe.

...Heelbolt falls under the railing, landing shoulder first, his nose in the dirt. He blinks rapidly for 10 seconds or so until his eyes, once beautifully alert, are blank. As his fellow horses, having just finished the race, jog by, his life is measured in shallow breaths – until he is no longer breathing, until he is just 1,200 pounds of expired muscle, his bloody, shattered leg hooked on a railing. It's hard to know what a peaceful death looks like, but this isn't it.”

Still, that number – 2,000 – staggering though it is, tells but a part of the story. Each year, hundreds more die back in their stalls from things like colic, laminitis, infection, or are simply “found dead” in the morning.

Then, too, slaughter. While the industry desperately tries to downplay the extent of the problem, cunningly flashing its zero-tolerance policies and aftercare initiatives in defense, the prevailing wisdom – backed by two scientific studies – is that the vast majority of spent or simply no-longer-wanted racehorses are brutally and violently bled-out and butchered in Canadian and Mexican slaughterhouses – some 12,000-15,000 Thoroughbreds alone each year.

All of this – the on-track kills, the stall deaths, the *exsanguinations* – leads to a single, inescapable conclusion: The American horseracing industry is engaged in wholesale carnage. Not hyperbole – carnage.

The truth is, Horseracing is in decline, and has been for some time: Just since 2000, U.S. Racing has suffered a net loss of 34 tracks; all other metrics – racedays, races, field sizes, “foal crops,” and, yes, attendance and handle – are also down, some of these 50% of what they were just 30 years ago. But even more telling is this: The bulk of the American horseracing industry is being heavily subsidized, with many tracks wholly propped up by slots and other gaming revenue. To use our state as an example, it is no exaggeration to say that if not for this corporate welfare – money that could, should, be going to education instead – all seven harness tracks and quite possibly, even likely, Finger Lakes and Aqueduct would have closed years ago. Clearly, independent, full-service casinos and lottery games are winning the market, and the competition will soon become that much stiffer with all-sports betting. But legislators, swayed by industry talk of job loss and “tradition,” keep sending lifeboats, which is not only an affront to our free-market principles, but allows for the continued killing of horses in the process.

Beyond the economic realities are the changing times in which we live. Sensibilities toward animal exploitation, most especially regarding entertainment, are rapidly evolving. In just the past few years:

- Ringling Bros. has closed its doors for good, ending 146 years of animal abuse.
- SeaWorld, after being exposed by the documentary *Blackfish*, has ended the captive-breeding of orcas and remains in slow, steady decline.
- The National Aquarium has vowed to release all of its remaining captive-dolphins to a seaside sanctuary by the end of next year.
- Both this state and Illinois have outlawed the use of elephants in any form of entertainment.

– There are rodeo bans in cities as diverse as Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Fort Wayne, Pasadena, and St. Petersburg.

– And perhaps most relevant to the issue at hand, just this past November Floridians voted overwhelmingly – by an over 2:1 margin – to outlaw greyhound racing in that state, a monumental win for animals that will in one fell swoop shutter 11 of the nation’s final 17 tracks – leaving dogracing in America all but dead.

So the question becomes, why should horseracing be exempt, especially given that the scale of killing and depth of suffering dwarfs all those other industries, as bad as they were and are, combined? We live in 21st Century America; we can, we should – we must – be better than this.

– Patrick Battuello