

## **It's Time for Congress to Wake Up**

I was reading an article the other day about how football star Michael Vick served 21 months in prison followed by two months of home confinement for fighting dogs. While dog fighting is outlawed in every state, it was not the state of Virginia that prosecuted Vick but instead it was the federal government! Such actions are extremely rare.

Mr. Vick was charged by a federal grand jury with violating federal law 18 USC 371, conspiring to travel in interstate commerce in aid of unlawful activities. Under our Constitution the federal government has jurisdiction over an activity otherwise regulated by the state if that activity affects interstate commerce.

Sadly, the federal government's compassion shown for pit bull dogs has been absent in the terrible mistreatment of Thoroughbred horses that is occurring daily at racetracks across America. According to the New York Times, every week in the United States, 24 Thoroughbred horses die while racing and countless others are broken down and maimed for the rest of their lives because they are being drugged to enhance their performance.

These wonderful animals are given countless numbers of so-called "therapeutic" drugs that are in essence performance-enhancing drugs. These include painkillers like Butazolidin which thins the blood, causing horses to bleed and, of course, Lasix to remedy the bleeding. Lasix has also been proven to leach calcium from the bones of human beings, making them susceptible to more fractures, etc.

By enacting the Interstate Horseracing Act of 1978 ("IHA") the federal government has allowed the simulcasting of races and off-track betting all across America. Ironically, the abuse of Thoroughbreds is now regularly televised and wagered upon under the authority of the IHA. The drugging of America's Thoroughbreds to enhance their racing performance clearly affects interstate commerce, and yet the federal government has thus far not acted to stop the cruelty inflicted upon these animals or the deception perpetrated upon the public by the use of these drugs.

Should we conclude that Washington cares more about pit bulls than it does about horses, notwithstanding that these brave animals pulled our covered wagons across America and carried us into battle time and time again? Or is Washington callous to the consequences its citizens must endure from wagering on drugged horses?

While the drugs flow, there exist all of these effete horse organizations that don't do one thing about drugs or lift one finger to try to change the status quo. Maybe if Mr. Vick had had these organizations turning a blind eye and minimizing the cruelty of dog fighting he would not have suffered the fate that he did.

And so the beat goes on. Next week, 24 more horses will die and countless others will be crippled. Four percent of our fans will have deserted us by the end of the year, as they do every year. It is my hope that the federal government will wake up and do something about all of this. Nobody else will. Nobody else can.

*Arthur Hancock III is owner of Stone Farm in Paris, Ky., and a founding member of the Water, Hay, Oats Alliance (WHOA) that supports H.R. 2012, legislation that would impose federal guidelines on medication use in horse racing and put drug testing oversight in the hands of the United States Anti-Doping Agency.*