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The John Holland vs. Charles Stenholm Debate [February and March, 2011]

as published in the North Platt Telegraph | [Horse Sense or Nonsense?](#)



vs.



	John Holland	Charles Stenholm
<p>Opening 02.18</p>	<p>'... horse slaughter is bad for the economy, the community and the taxpayer ...'</p> <p>Senator Tyson Larson's bills LB 305 and 306 are the latest examples of bad legislation introduced in an attempt to bring back the U.S. horse slaughter plants. LB 305 would require the taxpayers of Nebraska to pay for the establishment of an ante-mortem inspection program designed solely at circumventing the Congressional elimination of funding for mandatory USDA inspection of horses killed for human consumption.</p> <p>LB 306 would make it a crime for a horse rescue to refuse to accept any horse offered to it. These bills are part of a proxy war between corporate agriculture, breeders and what they see as the "animal rights" movement. LB 306 penalizes those working to compensate for over-breeding and is more a vendetta than reasoned legislation.</p> <p>Larson claims that opening a horse slaughter plant would be good for Nebraska's economy, but Nebraska already enjoys the second lowest unemployment in the country (4.4 percent). In fact, history tells us that it would bring only misery and loss to Nebraskans.</p> <p>I will present evidence proving that horse slaughter is bad for the economy, the community, the taxpayers, horse owners and the horses themselves. American horse slaughter is a dying practice, and spending treasure to resuscitate it is folly.</p> <p>Ignoring the worst economy in living memory, both [Charles] Stenholm and Larson claim that the closing of the slaughter plants has harmed the horse market and increased equine neglect. I will first prove this is impossible.</p> <p>A brief history of horse slaughter:</p> <p>In 1990, there were about 12 horse slaughter plants operating in the U.S. One of these was Central Nebraska Packing in North Platte. Along with</p>	<p>'... processing horses for human consumption is humane, economical and necessary ...'</p> <p>It was the principals learned in an agrarian childhood on the Rolling Plains of Texas that instilled in me the values of life. Those things learned from, and by watching, my parents and grandparents as they fought hard to make a life from the land. It was my desire to preserve those values and the love of the land that brought me to Washington to serve my country so long ago.</p> <p>There have been many hard fought battles based on those principals along the way. Many friends, family and colleagues have time and again asked and wondered why I would put my heart on the line to be attacked both in and outside the beltway. The answer is simple: I want to protect those values instilled in me by growing up on the land with my parents and grandparents for my grandchildren, their generation, and those to come.</p> <p>You would think that with over 26 years of public service under my belt that dinner conversations would be punctuated by questions about what the Gipper was like, impeachment trials or international economic policy but no... most are spent to my wife's dismay, on horse slaughter. The reason is simple: most people like a sensationalized story / fight both in and outside the beltway, and my involvement in the issue comes from those principals learned from my ancestors on the land so long ago.</p> <p>The first of those is that all life is valuable and should be respected. No one who has ever had to care for another living thing and has a heart could argue that. I wish that every child in America today had the same opportunities to raise animals and to learn those values from birth to death that I did.</p> <p>Horses are a part of that world for me, and while their utilitarian nature brings them closer in our lives than other livestock may,</p>

plants in Canada and Mexico USDA statistics show they slaughtered a total of 419,133 American horses that year. Both the number of slaughterhouses and horses slaughtered declined steadily through the decade despite no legal restrictions until California banned slaughter in 1998. Nobody claimed that this 77.5 percent reduction caused any problems.

By 2000 there were only three, foreign owned, horse slaughter plants left in the U.S.; two in Texas and one in Illinois. Horse slaughter declined until 2002, and then rebounded slightly to a level just over 100,000 horses a year.

In January 2007 the two Texas plants were closed when the courts ruled that a 1949 law against selling horsemeat for human consumption was still in effect. The Dallas Crown plant in Kaufman Texas had earlier been ordered closed by the town Board of Adjustments because of pollution, but had successfully remained open through legal delaying.

The remaining Cavel plant in DeKalb, Ill., was shut down in September 2007 after unsuccessfully challenging a new state law against slaughtering horses for human consumption. The removal of funding for required inspections had also closed the plant temporarily and the work-around program allowing the plants to pay for their own inspections was eventually ruled to be illegal. Like Dallas Crown, the plant was also facing massive fines for its sewage discharge.

The key to the issue is what happened after the plants closed; virtually nothing. The plants relocated their plants to Canada and Mexico in weeks.

In the 10 years before the closings an average of 117,121 American equines were slaughtered per year, and in the three years afterward the annual average was virtually the same at 116,867.

Just as many horses are being purchased at approximately the same prices from the same auctions as before the closings. Therefore, any

they while loved, are still an asset to many of their owners. What the animal rights activists such as Mr. Holland want to take away is the value of all of our animals. It seems to me that the government has been taking too much value out of our economy lately.

These are beautiful animals, and many people don't like to think that a horse could end up as a piece of meat on a European dinner table. I believe that we should work hard to protect all horse owners, both those who do object to processing and those who don't. Treating horses humanely isn't even part of the question, because we all agree that's a must. This entire issue comes down to a horse owner's decision about what they want to do with their animals. What the activists want to do is have the government tell you what you can and can't do with your horse. This is intrusive and wrong.

Reopening the processing plants - or opening new ones in Nebraska - will reestablish a floor price for horses and do a lot to stabilize the entire horse industry. My hat is off to the Nebraska Legislature and Sen. Tyson Larson for showing leadership to save an industry and bring the economic benefits to Nebraska and all horse owners. I look forward to debating this issue over the next four weeks in these pages, and I hope to convince all Nebraskans that processing horses for human consumption is humane, economical, and necessary as an end of life option for horse owners.

claim that the closures harmed the horse market or caused horses to be neglected is inescapably false.
 We have had slaughter available and it failed to protect the horse market from the recession.

John Holland

Charles Stenholm

**Week 2
02.25**

Understanding the property rights issue

Animal rights agenda and your rights

Using USDA statistics, I have previously debunked the myth that closing the U.S. horse slaughterhouses had any effect on the horse industry or on equine welfare. The statistics show there was no reduction in the number of American horses slaughtered, only a change in where they were slaughtered.

The animal rights activist who opposes horse slaughter and ultimately the use of any animals would never admit that animals are property. To do so would fall against their mantra that the use of animals for any human purpose always causes suffering. If you take away the property rights of owners through the use of laws and regulations then you end suffering by eliminating the sufferer.

Mr. Stenholm then claimed that slaughter was a “property rights” issue and that horse owners have the absolute right to do what they want with their horses. But eliminating horse slaughter would in no way limit what ordinary horse owners could do with their horses. They could still sell them or euthanize them. It would merely limit the purposes for which someone could buy horses.

Many of these people anoint themselves as self-appointed experts in the fields of animal husbandry and economics in order to scare the public with dirty picture shows and unsubstantiated numbers to bring about a change in the laws. Make no mistake, this is a multimillion dollar fundraising enterprise aimed at the elimination of animal owner’s rights. There are no gray areas here: this is an animal rights driven agenda to end your rights as a horse owner.

The real threat to property rights:

While the largest of these organizations, such as PETA, have raised tens of millions of dollars from the general public “to save horses,” almost none of the money has gone to save horses on the ground. Many, if not most, of the people who have given their hard earned money to those causes have been misled to believe they are supporting the care and feeding of animals. In reality, their money goes to feed public relations jockeys, on expense accounts, in ivory towers, in small towns like New York and Washington. In towns like these, \$3,999 (according to their own 2009 tax returns) to “rescue” one animal, either doesn’t

It is the horse slaughter industry itself that has repeatedly destroyed the property rights of horse owners, ordinary citizens and taxpayers. I will show this by revealing a little more of its dark history.

Behind the now closed Dallas Crown slaughterhouse there is a community called “Boggy Bottom.” The community lived with an indescribable stench caused by a mixture of the plant’s gore and a system of misters that constantly sprayed chlorine into the air in a vain attempt to mask the odor.

A nearby hospital was forced to spend precious funds to install an expensive air treatment system to protect its patients from the noxious

odor.

The plant also had chronic waste disposal issues and refused to pay its fines for overwhelming the town's treatment system. At one point they attempted to force the gory mess down the sewer with a pump, causing blood to rise into the bathtubs and drains of the Boggy Bottom neighborhood.

Worst of all, the Boggy Bottom residents were trapped there because the plant's presence destroyed their property values and they could not sell their homes.

Eventually the Kaufman Board of Adjustments ordered the plant closed, but Dallas Crown won a restraining order and dragged the town to court on each of the violations, literally exhausting its budget. Yes, citizens of Kaufman know about having their property rights violated!

This pattern has become the norm. The rebuilt "state-of-the-art" Cavel plant was never in compliance on its discharge a single month between its opening and its closing. The neighbors awoke one morning to see a huge tank foaming over onto the ground and splitting at the seams.

The Natural Valley Farms plant in Canada (where Cavel relocated) was caught dumping millions of gallons of horse blood into the river and a lagoon as well as leaving mountains of entrails on the open ground causing the earth to become sterile.

Yet despite this grim record, Mr. Stenholm strongly supported Ed Butcher's outrageous law in Montana. HB.418 stripped away property owner's legal rights making it impossible for communities like Boggy Bottom to challenge the building of a horse slaughterhouse. Courts cannot block licensing on many environmental grounds, and any injunction requires a hefty bond and threatens substantial financial penalties to challengers.

When Butcher subsequently announced he was going to get a slaughter

seem extravagant or it buys a lot of vegan lunches at five-star restaurants while talking to your advertising executive. Either way, the millions going into their coffers operate few if any shelters — and the ones they do operate have been closed to taking in new animals for years. This entire issue comes down to a horse owner's decision about what they want to do with their animals. Activists want to make that decision for you through the government. This is intrusive and wrong.

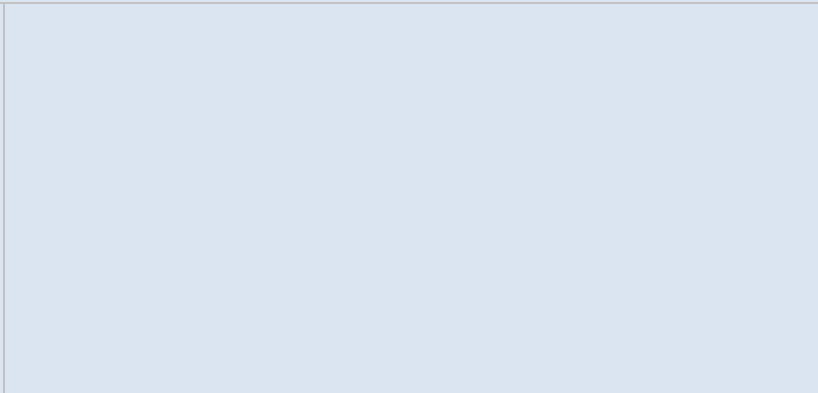
In the meantime, I applaud Nebraska's low unemployment rate, which apparently Mr. Holland believes you arrived at by doing things exactly like the rest of the country. Bringing processing plants to Nebraska would provide at least a few hundred jobs in the plants and in related businesses. While that may not seem like a lot in the grand scheme of things, it certainly is for those people who currently don't have them.

Horse slaughter in this country is highly regulated by the federal government to ensure the safe and humane handling of these animals from transportation to slaughter for the food supply. We must be vigilant in our enforcement and oversight of these laws to ensure the welfare of all horses. However, it doesn't matter what the truth is and how many regulations are imposed, the other side likens this argument to warfare: attack the industry from all sides and deprive it of profits, while pressing Congress for a federal law banning horse exports. As John Holland said in the Houston Chronicle: "[t]he federal ban is the name of the game and everybody in the anti-slaughter community knows it." A famous English poet once said that "all's fair in love and war." Well, this isn't war, and in this case, playing fast and loose with the facts affects people's jobs, and often condemns the very horses they claim to be saving to a fate of starvation and abuse.

plant built in the town of Hardin, Mont., the town council studied the issue and immediately passed ordinance 2010-1 to block it!

Finally, there is the issue of the relation of horse theft to slaughter. In the years before California outlawed slaughter, horse theft had been increasing steadily, but in the seven years afterward horse theft dropped by over 84 percent. Horse theft emotionally devastates its victims. If slaughter returns to Nebraska, future victims' rights will be forfeited.

It seems that Charlie only supports "property rights" for clients of his lobby firm and not as a general principle.



John Holland

Charles Stenholm

**Week 3
03.04**

Far from an economic advantage

Jobs can be developed in Nebraska

Mr. Stenholm referred to the USDA statistics that I referenced (to show that we still have as many horses as ever going to slaughter) as "dubious numbers". He also referred to the 900 pages of horrific images of mangled horses arriving at slaughter in Texas as "dirty pictures". Those photos were also from the USDA and were exposed under a FOIA request.

Since Charlie apparently favors debating with adjectives rather than facts and images, I will offer a few adjectives to describe the Larson legislation; impetuous, vindictive, feckless, misguided and futile. Those were the five kindest I could conjure, and here is why.

As amended, LB.306 is intended to force HSUS operated rescues to take any horse offered or face misdemeanor charges. Not only is this outrageously unfair, it is impotent because HSUS does not operate any rescues in Nebraska. So that leaves LB.305 and the "several hundred jobs" Charlie says it would bring to Nebraska.

Sorry Charlie! Sen. Larson apparently forgot to do his homework again. The farm bill language that allows states to perform inspections is limited

Nebraska has one of the lowest unemployment rates, but apparently the animal right activists believe you already have enough jobs and economic prosperity to go around. Mr. Holland is right when he says that the horse processing plants were moved to both Canada and Mexico after they closed in the United States and that approximately the same number of American horses are still shipped to those countries for processing. He triumphantly claims this as evidence that banning horse slaughter had no impact on the horse industry; and that, in fact, the plight of the unwanted horse has been exacerbated solely by the recession that began in the fall of 2008. Mr. Holland ignores a critical point when he comes to this conclusion: greater input costs.

Horses shipped to Mexico or Canada must be shipped greater distances than if they were humanly euthanized at plants here in this country. This means higher costs in gas and fees, and less money paid to a horse owner, which will lower the price of what a horse receives at a livestock market. This makes sense: if a

to slaughter operations having 25 or fewer employees, and USDA officials say it doesn't allow horse inspections at all. In the unlikely event the USDA relents on horsemeat inspections the prize is still just 25 low paying, dangerous, dehumanizing minimum wage jobs.

Let's talk money and bureaucracy:

LB.305 would create a whole new state bureaucracy to manage an inspection system for an "industry" of no more than 25 workers. Once created, that bureaucracy would cost the taxpayers of Nebraska in perpetuity, and since antemortem inspections require licensed veterinarians, it is probable that the real employment boom would be in this taxpayer funded government boondoggle.

To gauge what this investment might provide in returns, consider the smallest of the US plants which employed between 33 and 42 people. Dallas Crown 2004 Tax filings, exposed during their fight with the town, show they had gross receipts of \$12,007,611 on which they paid \$5 in federal taxes and gave \$3 to charity!

The horsemeat market is controlled by foreign corporations who have a stranglehold on the distribution. An American company would have no choice but to sell to this cartel at whatever price they were offered. This is precisely what happened in Canada when the Natural Valley Farms plant began killing horses for Cavel's parent corporation Velda, LLC (Belgium). The plant finally went bankrupt with losses of \$44 million dollars and Velda moved on, leaving a financial and ecological wasteland behind them.

There is little in this for the horse industry either. A study by Deloitte Consulting estimated the horse industry produces a \$102 billion total economic impact. Horse slaughter accounts for approximately \$36 million of this income, meaning it contributes only about 3 cents of every \$100 generated by the horse industry. And it gets worse.

Wyoming and Montana both passed similarly ill-conceived laws and have

buyer has to pay more to ship a horse to a processing plant, he can't pay the horse owner as much. Horses that previously brought in \$1,000 at auction now bring in less than \$100, if they sell at all.

Of course, the recession only made this situation worse. More horse owners could no longer afford to keep their horses, which caused a glut in the market and an even lower price to be affixed to horses at markets. Now, most livestock markets have either stopped selling horses or will only sell them if the owner pays a fee to the market with the full expectation that if the horse isn't sold the owner must take it back.

New plants would not only serve to bring some stability back to the horse market, but would also bring much-needed jobs into the economy. The economic effects of plants like these are far reaching and often not in ways we typically think about. Sure, there are jobs created in the plants, but jobs are also created in livestock markets, airports that ship products, medical laboratories, truck companies and many more. Mr. Holland and the animal rights activists may be fine with these jobs going to Canada and Mexico; but I am not.

yet to attract a slaughter plant. Central Nebraska Packing has said it does not intend to reopen its horse slaughter operation and it is unlikely Nebraska will attract another plant given the substantial risk that federal legislation could eventually shut it down.

Moreover, it is entirely likely that the European Union will continue to restrict its horsemeat imports on safety grounds, and changes in federal law would put a new US plant under FDA oversight. The FDA bans most common horse medications from food animals and classifies horses as companion animals.

Larson’s bills are just the latest examples of reckless, ill-conceived and ineffective state legislation spurred on by the “animal rights” fear mongering of lobbyists like Charlie.

John Holland

Charles Stenholm

**Wrap-Up
03.11**

Slaughterhouses provide nothing positive

Let the community make the decision

First, I want to thank the Telegraph for providing this unique venue for people to hear both sides of this issue. I also want to thank Mr. Stenholm for confirming that there has been no reduction in the number of US horses going to slaughter since the US plants closed. They have simply been shipped to Canada and Mexico for slaughter.

I must start my last article by reiterating one thing: this debate is about personal property rights and the animal activists who want to take them from you. Nothing that has been said in this debate changes that. Mr. Holland has always cherry-picked statistics in an attempt to cloak his opinion in the guise of fact, ultimately so he can claim that his argument is one of economic concerns. The statistics he relies upon to assert his “factual” opinion are public record and are not, despite what he would have you believe, conclusive for one side or the other of this argument.

That admission is extremely important because it proves once and for all that the countless articles about horses being abandoned and neglected because of the plant closings were nothing but propaganda.

Anecdotally, I know that horses are worth significantly less than they were before the ban. I believe the recession has played a factor in this price decline, but I also believe that the closing of the slaughter plants played a much larger role, because the value of horses was dropping precipitously before the 2008 financial crash. But I’ll wait to assert fact until the nonpartisan Government Accountability Office releases its findings in the next couple of months on the impact of the federal ban on horsemeat

I said that I would show that horse slaughter is bad for the economy, the community, the tax payers, horse owners and the horses themselves. I have done just that by recounting the dark history of the industry.

I have shown that the horse slaughter plants in North America have provided nothing positive for their communities and that they have caused enormous loss to horse owners, neighbors and taxpayers, as well

as posing a threat to the health of the people who consumed the meat. Each of these plants opened with the public promise it would be different and “state-of-the-art” and each became a brutal, foul cesspool.

Charlie promises to “bring back the jobs” lost as a result of the closings. In recent years, America has lost countless jobs in industries ranging from textiles to computers. Of all these, the horse slaughter jobs are the very last that any community should wish to recover. They are demeaning, dehumanizing, dangerous, low-paying jobs with no future and no self-respect.

Is this the career future Nebraska wants for its sons and daughters? Would you brag that your boy landed a job butchering horses? If returning horse slaughter to the US is a good idea, then how does Charlie explain the fact that Texas and Illinois have repeatedly defeated legislation aimed at overturning their state bans?

The idea of establishing a whole new state bureaucracy on the unlikely chance it might create 25 such jobs is not the kind of thinking that put Nebraska where it is today. It is a blind reaction to carefully nurtured prejudice about Eastern “animal rights activists” meddling in Nebraska’s affairs.

But it has not been PETA or the “Animal Rights” movement that has pushed so hard to eliminate horse slaughter. It has been horse owners and lovers along with people impacted by the horse slaughter business. The “animal rights” advocates hold different views than those of us in the equine welfare community. A few animal rights folks even believe that any use of an animal is immoral.

We on the other hand, relish the many amazing jobs equines do for us. From therapy to dressage to racing, we see them as our animal partners. Many of us are involved in these sports and therapies. We simply want our equine athletes treated with compassion and fairness.

We believe that the relationship between Americans and their equines

inspections (a report, I must add, that animal rights activists opposed having done at all. I wonder why?)

No matter. If Mr. Holland’s arguments are correct he shouldn’t care if the ban on horsemeat inspections is lifted. Judging by his economic analysis, there is no significant market for horsemeat abroad or in American zoos, and no community in its right mind would allow a plant to be built and sustained, nor would want the jobs that would come with it. Therefore, no processing plants would open because there are no economic reasons to open one, and there would be no one willing to invest in one either. Why would it matter to Mr. Holland if inspections of horsemeat were allowed again?

Perhaps it’s because Mr. Holland’s motivations aren’t economic at all, and are actually those of the broader animal rights movement. We already have laws to protect horses and our communities from all of the animal rights activists’ concerns regarding horse processing: humane slaughter laws to protect against mistreatment during transportation and at the processing plants; thievery laws to protect owners from horse thieves; and environmental laws to protect communities from the side effects of ANY slaughter plant. If horse processing plants are reopened those laws must be stringently enforced, because all animals should be treated humanely throughout their lives and with the same respect when euthanized, and horse owners should expect that their property will be protected.

Federal law says there are three humane ways to end the life of a horse: 1) by a bullet shot to the head, 2) by captive bolt, and 3) by chemical euthanasia. Even animal rights groups agree on this – though they much prefer the most expensive option, which is chemical euthanasia. So, the question isn’t about how to humanely kill a horse, it’s about whether the horse goes into a landfill after it’s killed, or if it becomes a commodity that has monetary value and supports American jobs. Animal rights

has always been central to the American experience and history and we believe that selling out these magnificent creatures is morally indefensible. We should not be surprised that horse slaughter leads to human misery as well.

The horse business is not a meat industry. If folks like Larson succeed in making it so, then horse owners will inevitably pay a terrible price. Effective medications will become unavailable and our horses will be tracked from birth like cattle.

If Sen. Larson's horse breeding business cannot produce horses people want to buy without using the state to kill off the current population, then perhaps he should consider another occupation.

activists don't want animals ascribed any monetary value, and don't like the idea of people in other countries eating horsemeat. So, they work to get laws passed that effectively ban horse slaughter in America, but when the mess comes in the form of more unwanted, neglected, abandoned, and abused horses, these groups do little to clean it up. I applaud Sen. Larson for introducing legislation to hold these organizations accountable, and give rights back where they belong: to the horse owner.