



# Canyon Ranch

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SENATE AGRICULTURE

EXHIBIT NO. 3

DATE 3-12-09

BILL NO. HB 418

March 12, 2009

TO: AGRICULTURE, LIVESTOCK AND IRRIGATION COMMITTEE

**I LIKE HORSES!** That is why I have been in the business of raising registered Quarter Horses since 1971. My family has been in Montana since 1864. My great-grandfather, Frank Keene, imported his first "purebred" stallion in 1910 to his ranch at Canton (near Townsend), on the Missouri River.

Our business needs a bottom base price for the horses that don't make it into a merchantable market. All horses are not Flickas or Black Beauties. Some horses are just not nice, and some have conformation problems that make them undesirable for a useful career. In the past, we have waited a few years to give them a "chance" to grow out of any problem. Now, we cannot afford to invest this extra time and money into them.

As an example, I have a four year old gelding that bucks every time he is saddled. As a breeder, I have to maintain a high standard to keep a good reputation. A reputation is what I sell, and I market it through every horse I sell. I cannot sell this horse to anyone, but I have 5 years invested in him. The gestation for a mare is 11 months. I have veterinary bills, farrier fees, months of training time and costs, plus pasture and hay for the winter months. I cannot just give this kind of horse away to a good home and continue to stay in business; this kind of horse does not deserve a good home.

Most all of our horses develop into productive horses and are well received by our customers. But we are a business, and our profit margin isn't there to give bad and unwanted horses away. We all have horses who have served us well and have been faithful companions, but these are not the horses to whom we are referring. These good horses have earned their retirement and are allowed to rest at good homes.

I urge you to pass HB 418 to allow horse processing plants in Montana. Not only would it take care of about 90,000 unwanted horses each year in the United States, but it would provide hundreds of jobs. Jobs are needed by many people and would include buyers, truckers, inspectors, plant workers, shippers, and others. We need jobs, and we don't need undesirable horses.

Let us learn from the mistakes that have been experienced. Processing plants should not be built in urban areas, and, yes, all facilities and operators should be taxed appropriately. None of us want to slaughter our old faithful pets, but there are some horses that are just not useable and some are just not wanted.

Sincerely,

Ron Burns  
Burns Ranch Quarter Horses  
White Sulphur Springs, MT 59645