

Reader's View: Race day lasix ban is a deadly mistake

By Dr. Thomas Tobin

Recently, two U.S. Senators introduced a bill misleadingly entitled the “Horseracing Integrity Act.” If enacted, it will lead to additional horseracing injuries and deaths because it bans an important protective medication, Furosemide, commonly known as Lasix. The Senate should not follow the House in advancing this misguided bill.

As a veterinarian, professor of veterinary science, toxicologist, and Ph.D. pharmacologist, I was disappointed to learn of the introduction of a Senate companion to this travesty of a House bill. I can only conclude that misinformation has spread rampantly on Capitol Hill. This legislation is harmful to the horseracing industry; the local economies dependent on the industry; and perhaps most importantly, the health and welfare of horses.

I spent my early career researching the use of Lasix in racehorses, resulting in over 25 Equine Medication Research papers and presentations. I have created tests, standards, and proposed thresholds for Lasix which have been used widely. I am disturbed to know there are horse breeders and animal rights activists who think it is a good idea to ban the race-day therapeutic medication.

The protective effects of Lasix were identified by American horsemen and veterinarians 50 years ago and laid out well by Dr. Al Gabel of Ohio State University in 1977. Equine research has scientifically proven that Lasix provides the only effective control of Exercise Induced Pulmonary Hemorrhage (EIPH), or bleeding into the lungs.

EIPH is a progressive disease that occurs every time a horse runs. EIPH produces visible blood in the trachea of 55-73 percent of horses in their first race, 95 percent in their second race, and essentially 100 percent by their third race. Lung damage is cumulative; the most severe outcome of EIPH is sudden death. Lasix has been used in race horses for over 50 years because it is scientifically proven to reduce capillary blood pressure in race horses and to significantly reduce or mitigate bleeding in the lungs.

Proponents of the “Horseracing Integrity Act” have conflated the use of Lasix with musculoskeletal injuries. These claims are without merit. There is no association in any scientific paper between Lasix and racing breakdowns.

Another claim by bill proponents is that Lasix will interfere with post-race drug testing due to dilution of the urine sample. I addressed this argument 40 years ago in my research. Lasix is a short acting diuretic, with urine dilution largely complete by two hours. However, the tightly regulated administration of Lasix is required four hours before a race. Thus, Lasix has no ability to interfere with blood or urine testing after a race.

Banning Lasix will adversely impact the health and welfare of racehorses. Increased numbers of horses will bleed significantly into in their lungs, and some will die. Unfortunately, that is likely the goal of some animal rights activists who support the bill as a means to slowly end horse racing altogether. For those who truly care about horses and the integrity of the sport, they should contact their federal legislators to request that they oppose the “Horseracing Integrity Act.”

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