

How the legislative process works on the state level

Introduction:

The occupations and leisure activities of thousands of people across Colorado involve horses. The 1999 Colorado Equine Impact Survey sponsored by the Colorado Horse Development Authority showed the Colorado Horse Industry accounts for 4.4 billion in assets and 430 million in expenditures and income annually excluding public and show facilities and commercial racing. As would be expected, an industry of this size is effected by a number of public policy decisions. Therefore, its members are very interested in monitoring the legislative and regulatory environment for issues that might impact its operation and sometimes use the legislative process to create rules that benefit the industry. The Colorado Horse Council sees policy making to be so Important to the Horse Industry that the mission of the organization is implemented primarily through legislation and education.

Issue Identification:

The Colorado Horse Council is fortunate to have the services of a professional lobbyist to represent their interests at the State Capitol. Our lobbyist works throughout the year with the Legislation and Regulation Committee (LRC). During the summer and fall, networking with the horse industry and in political circles allows emerging issues to be identified. Annual strategic planning requires the LRC to focus on those issues that will be targeted for the upcoming year's activities. By September the LRC submits its objectives for approval by the Board of Directors as part of the Strategic Plan. Although the general areas of concern are usually identified in the plan, specific problems, local regulations, and ordinances would typically be called to the Council's attention by individual members or industry sectors. LRC plans must include flexibility to be responsive to these needs. Issues impacting the horse industry are then addressed through education or legislation and regulation or a combination of both.

Channels to Issue Resolution:

CoHoCo generally holds that the best way to solve any problem is to be educated about the problem. This is true whether the education is intended to influence behaviors at the root of a problem, from the bottom up, or to increase the horse industry's awareness of the need to approach a solution from the top down, through creating a law. Through better understanding, people are able to design more logical and practical solutions.

When a proposed solution has gathered enough momentum to be presented through the Colorado Horse Council it may be categorized into one of three types of campaigns; legislation, a ballot initiative, or an education/awareness campaign. The following descriptions have generalized how the Colorado Horse Council uses these techniques.

Legislation Process:

If a legislator is sponsoring a bill that the Colorado Horse Council believes would impact the Horse Industry, we attempt to have our voice heard as a representative of the industry. Several opportunities to voice opinion on a bill are built into the system. Testifiers may present their view on issues during committee hearings on proposed legislation. Constituents may write, telephone, or e-mail their legislators to express their views or concerns on an issue. Action alerts and an education campaign could be implemented to mobilize support or opposition among the horse industry. Conversely if an issue appears to be best addressed through legislation, we would seek to find a sponsor for a proposed bill through the Council's lobbyist or LRC member contacts.

The Horse Council may send delegates to participate in legislative activities or create an event for interacting with legislators. An example of this is hosting a "legislative coffee", an early morning informal meeting between Horse Council representatives and the legislators and their aids for the purpose of

identifying the Horse Council as an information resource or to provide information on a specific issue.

When the legislative session opens, the CoHoCo lobbyist reviews all bills and ballot initiative proposals. He then narrows the list to those that may impact horse industry. This list is reviewed with the LRC, to develop position recommendations (support / oppose / monitor). The board votes on the position recommendations and then the LRC shares the information with the membership.

Ballot Initiative Process:

Colorado citizens can use the initiative process to place questions on the ballot and call a vote on a particular issue, the outcome of the vote is then used to direct legislation on the question. The timeline in Colorado for ballot petitions allows questions to be presented up until May, the summer months can be used for raising support for the question or organizing opposition. The November elections decide the issue with the vote. It is the particular issues making it to the ballot that are giving members of the horse industry cause to examine this mechanism. In Colorado, this process has been widely used during the last decade by special interest groups including animal rights activists and environmentalists. The resulting laws are viewed by those impacted directly to have had negative impacts on their industries. There are certain areas of the economy that are especially vulnerable to regulation through ballot initiative process, most notable to the horse industry would be using the process to enact legislation governing agriculture. The ballot initiative process is a lofty democratic concept. However our system is based on representative government and individual rights that balance the needs of minorities with the majorities' desires. For agricultural issues, this is particularly sensitive because through this process the urban-based majority may dictate policy for the rural-based agricultural minority, who must then live by what may be an uninformed decision. Understandably, the Colorado Horse Council has more opportunity to oppose ballot initiatives than to support them. We are currently working to build a higher degree of responsibility into the process for the private citizen or organization attempting to create public policy through this instrument. The legislative approach has already been attempted unsuccessfully and using the ballot initiative process itself to change it may be the next strategy.

Education and Awareness Process:

Components of an education and awareness campaign are used in any effort to address issues. The main differences between this process and the others covered in this report are in where the process ends. If an issue has been identified as requiring an educational campaign, the LRC may request the Council's education committee to adopt the issue and develop programming to reach the membership and the horse industry. If the issue is especially political in nature the task of implementing a campaign may stay with the LRC. The educational campaign may use any or all of the following methods to reach its target audience; networking with groups and organizations, town meetings, newspaper columns, letters to the editor, bulk mailed information, or broadcast e-mails. The diversity of the horse industry makes typical classroom education very difficult at best, however in the form of an Expo or seminar with presentations on issues this traditional method may also be used. A timeline and specific actions would be developed and outcome measures identified. The final element of the campaign is budgeting. The Colorado Horse Council has been successful in partnering with a variety of industry segments to finance issues that are relevant to the industry segment. A portion of the general budget for the Colorado Horse Council is dedicated to educational programs.

Evaluation of Results

In the legislative process and the ballot initiative process there is a definitive result to the Horse Council's effort. The votes cast either by legislators or by the general public either support or oppose the position held by the Council on the issue. The impact of an educational campaign is more

difficult to evaluate, however, a well-run campaign will identify relevant indicators to serve as outcome measures. Ultimately, the best evaluators are the people the campaign is intended to serve. Our members let us know if the job we have done has met their needs, through their comments and through their renewals.

Issues facing Colorado for 2000 and Beyond

- Growth, loss of agricultural lands

- Ballot Initiative Reform

- Resources Management, especially water

- Taxation

- Liability