

**House Floor Remarks of U.S. Rep. Nick J. Rahall, II
Tuesday, January 25, 2005**

A Living Symbol of America Must Not Be Slaughtered

Mr. Speaker, today I am introducing legislation to restore the prohibition on the commercial sale and slaughter of wild free-roaming horses and burros.

My legislation is necessary because of 36 lines that were hidden away in the recently enacted Consolidated Appropriations Act that overturned more than 30 years of national policy on the protection and management of wild free-roaming horses and burros. This backdoor legislative maneuver, enacted without public notice, will make these animals available to the highest bidder for processing into commercial products.

We need to stop this senseless and inhumane policy change before it can be carried out.

This body needs to be reminded of the public outcry, much of it from the voices of children across the United States, that sparked Congress in 1971 to pass the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act (Public Law 92-195). That law established as national policy “that wild free-roaming horses and burros shall be protected from capture, branding, harassment, and death; and to accomplish this they are considered in the area where presently found, as an integral part of the natural system of the public lands.” Just as importantly, the law directed that “no wild free-roaming horse or burros or its remains may be sold or transferred for consideration for processing into commercial products.”

It has been illegal for the past 33 years to sell or transfer wild horses and burros for processing into commercial products because many Americans abhor the thought. They would be aghast to know that these animals now can and will be slaughtered so their meat can be offered on menus in France, Belgium and Japan.

The 1971 Act directed the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the Forest Service to enforce the law on public lands. Unfortunately, these agencies, especially the BLM, have not lived up to the task. Reports of the Government Accountability Office and the Inspector General, as well as newspaper exposes, have outlined numerous instances where the BLM has failed to properly manage these animals.

Instead of addressing these long-term and widespread management problems, we have just seen the enactment of a quick and dirty fix. Now under the guise of

“managing” these living symbols of the American West, the agency will be permitted to allow the slaughter of animals that they had been previously charged with protecting.

What makes this slaughter provision all the more senseless is that humane alternatives exist and federal agencies have the authority to carry out such humane actions as adoption, sterilization, relocation, and placement with qualified individuals and organizations. To suggest that an acceptable solution to a federal agency’s management shortcomings is commercial slaughter is an irresponsible approach to our public lands and the wildlife that roam them.

A public outcry has again begun across the United States over the change in law that now allows the commercial sale and slaughter of wild free-roaming horses and burros. We need to act before it is too late for thousands of these animals. I am pleased to introduce my legislation today with my colleague from Kentucky Mr. Whitfield. I urge my other colleagues to support this bill so that we may have the prompt restoration of a just and humane policy for wild free-roaming horses and burros.