

VERN BUCHANAN  
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## Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515-0916

November 10, 2015

The Honorable Sally Jewell  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell:

I am outraged to learn that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) illegally sold nearly 1,800 wild horses to a Colorado rancher who in turn sold them to Mexican slaughter plants at a great profit. It is unacceptable that BLM's disregard of the law resulted in the use of taxpayer funds to facilitate the inhumane slaughter of iconic American wildlife.

In a recent report, the Department of the Interior's Inspector General (IG) found that BLM "did not follow current law" and "also failed to follow its own policy of limiting horse sales and ensuring that the horses sold went to good homes and were not slaughtered."

The report states that BLM allowed an individual livestock hauler to purchase 1,794 horses between 2008 and 2012. Using intermediaries, he then sold the majority of these animals to slaughterhouses in Mexico for considerable profit. BLM received information that the hauler was sending his horses to slaughter, but neglected to thoroughly investigate these claims and continued selling animals to the hauler.

Selling wild horses for slaughter is a violation of law and the Bureau's own policies.

BLM manages the U.S. wild horse population and is empowered to humanely destroy excess horses. While BLM can sell excess horses to third parties in certain circumstances, the Bureau's internal guidelines prohibit the sale to slaughterers by requiring buyers to provide good homes and humane care to the animals.

Moreover, during the period investigated by the IG, Congress prohibited BLM from spending funds "for the destruction of healthy, unadopted, wild horses and burros in the care of [BLM] or its contractors or for the sale of wild horses and burros that results in their destruction for processing into commercial products." As you know, horsemeat can be toxic to humans

Last year, more than 150,000 American horses were butchered in Canada and Mexico and then transported overseas for consumption in Japan, Italy and other countries. These animals can suffer incredible abuse even before arriving at the slaughterhouse. During transportation, they

are often confined without food and water in overcrowded trailers. At the slaughterhouse, horses are further inhumanely treated, and are sometimes alive and kicking during dismemberment.

I am also troubled that, as part of this illegal sale, \$140,000 of taxpayer money was used to transport horses to the buyer. Moreover, the sale by BLM helped the buyer earn more than \$150,000 in profits from selling the horses for slaughter. These are funds that properly belong to the American public.

It is shocking that the employees who sold the animals to the hauler received bonuses for these sales. It is even more disturbing that BLM continued to sell horses to the hauler even after they were given information that he was sending the horses to slaughter. And it is a dereliction of duty that BLM did not attempt to verify the information they received.

BLM must be held accountable for at the very least ignoring the law and at worst breaking the law.

I respectfully request that the Department of the Interior provide my office with written answers to the following questions within 30 days:

1. Please describe the discipline imposed upon BLM employees who facilitated these illegal transactions. If these employees were not terminated, please state why the agency believes it is proper to continue to employ individuals who supported criminal activity.
2. What steps are Interior and BLM taking to recover the \$140,000 of taxpayer funds use to deliver horses to the hauler?
3. Is Interior or BLM taking action to recover the hauler's profits from the illegal slaughter of the horses?
4. Is Interior or BLM taking action to recover bonuses paid to any employees who facilitated this crime?
5. Does BLM receive reports that buyers of horses may be illegally selling horses for slaughter? If so, why were reports ignored in the case described in the IG report? Can you say with certainty that reports have not been ignored in any other potential cases?
6. The IG report identifies Southwest Livestock LLC as a "kill buyer" that exported 12,000 horses per year to Mexico for slaughter after such activity was banned. Please describe what actions, if any, you are taking to ensure that this company is not engaging in horse slaughter and is held accountable for its illegal activities.
7. Please provide your understanding of why federal and state prosecutors failed to take action in the case described in the IG report. In particular, please describe any interaction that employees of Interior or BLM had with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Colorado or the State of Colorado Conejos County District Attorney's Office with respect to the activities described in the IG report, noting the following:

- Whether any employees testified under oath about these activities.
- Whether any employees were offered incentives for their testimony, such as potential immunity or reduced charges.
- Any family relationships that employees of Bureau of Land Management have with the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Colorado or the State of Colorado Conejos County District Attorney's Office.

I look forward to your prompt response and thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Vern Buchanan  
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Neil Kornze, Director, Bureau of Land Management