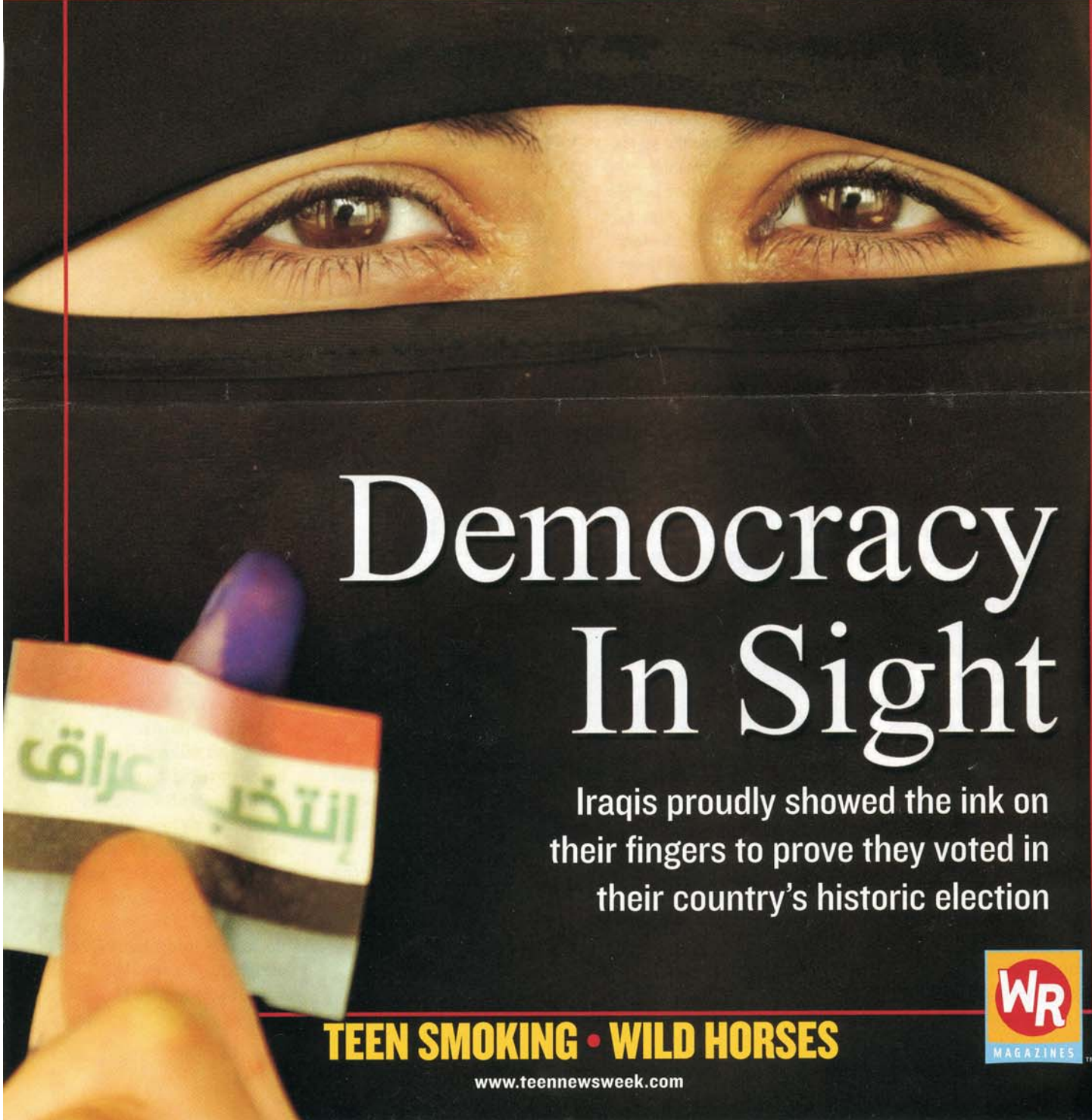


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Democracy In Sight

Iraqis proudly showed the ink on their fingers to prove they voted in their country's historic election

TEEN SMOKING • WILD HORSES

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—All Jarocki/Reuters/Newscom



Wild Horses Couldn't Stop Them

A new law could mean death to thousands of mustangs.

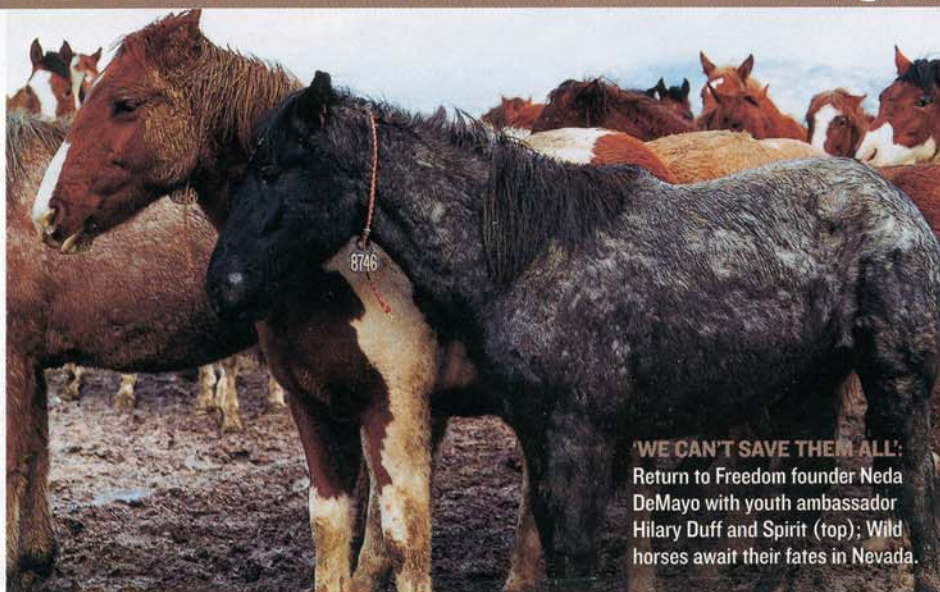
CORRALLED IN A FEDERAL HOLDING pen at Palomino Valley, Nev., a buckskin mare suddenly faces an uncertain future. The 12-year-old horse was rounded up in November as part of a federal program to humanely control the West's mustang population. At one time, the captured horse might have been relocated to a grassy farm in Oklahoma or Kansas. But that's all changed, thanks to a controversial revision of the 1971 law protecting wild horses and burros (small donkeys). The mare could now be sold, killed, and exported as horsemeat to countries that consider it a delicacy.

Icons of independence and a living reminder of the Old West, mustangs have always excited fierce passions. But the passion turned to anger after Sen. Conrad Burns (R-Mont.) inserted an amendment in the federal budget that lifted the ban on selling wild horses for slaughter. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) must now sell "without limitation" every captured horse that is 10 or older or that has proved unadoptable. The new rule applies to 8,400 horses in captivity and many more in the future.

Relief for ranchers

The mustangs' troubles are due in part to another Western icon: cattle ranchers. The ranchers say the wild horses are ruining grazing land. Currently, 37,000 mustangs share public rangeland with several million head of cattle. The result has been overgrazing, made worse by six years of drought.

To restore the land, the BLM has cut the number



'WE CAN'T SAVE THEM ALL': Return to Freedom founder Neda DeMayo with youth ambassador Hilary Duff and Spirit (top); Wild horses await their fates in Nevada.

of cattle allowed. Ranchers say the number of horses and burros should also be reduced. The BLM suggests that the number of horses and burros be cut by 9,000. "If we don't receive relief, and soon, we'll be out of business," Nevada rancher Kenneth Jones told state lawmakers last summer.

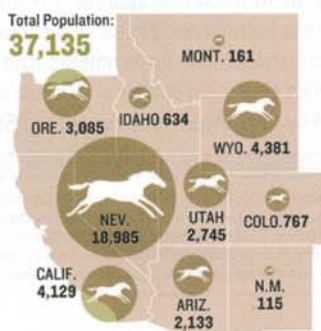
Nobody can predict how many horses will wind up in slaughterhouses. Burns believes "most of these horses" won't. He predicts that sales—expected to begin later this year—will be simpler than adoptions.

Others complain that Burns came up with the worst possible solution. "This consigns thousands of horses to death," says Howard Crystal, a lawyer for the Fund for Animals.

"What's so senseless about this is that humane alternatives exist," notes Rep. Nick Rahall (D-W.Va.). He suggests controlling the populations by "fixing" the horses so they can't reproduce. Meanwhile, the BLM is talking to private horse sanctuaries in hopes they will take some of the animals. Neda DeMayo runs Return to Freedom: American Wild Horse Sanctuary in California. She promises to save as many horses as she can afford to, but, she says, "we can't save them all."

—From a NEWSWEEK article by Andrew Murr

Where Mustangs Run



Home on the range

Horse advocates say that the more numerous cattle, not the mustangs, are damaging the range. "It's not the 37,000 horses that are tearing up the land," says Chris Heyde, of the Society for Animal Protective Legislation.

What do you think?

Should the law be changed to protect wild mustangs and burros? Let us know!

@ E-mail us!

letters@teennewsweek.com

—From top: Gianni Protti; Amanda Marsalis for Newsweek; Map source: Bureau of Land Management