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FOX News Highlights Democrats' $700 Million Welfare Program for Wild Horses

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Critics Worry Measure to Save Wild Horses Is Taxpayer Drain
William Lajeunesse, FOX News
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Taxpayers could be on the hook for $700 million if a measure to put wild horses back home on the range passes Congress.

A bill that would save wild horses and burros in the western United States from controlled killings and set aside millions of acres for them is heading to the Senate after passing the House of Representatives this month.

But the price tag, at a time of economic recession and gaping deficits, has some lawmakers champing at the bit to bridle the movement to finance and save these symbols of the American West.

"People have lost their jobs. They can't keep their homes. And the answer to people losing their homes is -- let's go spend $700 million for homes and welfare for wild horses," said

Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Texas.

"The leaders of this Congress have more concern for creating a home for horses than jobs for Americans," said Rep. Rob Bishop, R-Utah.

Wild mustangs and burros have been under federal protection for nearly 40 years, but the fast-growing population has become unmanageable.

Under the Restore Our American Mustangs Act, the number of acres that the estimated 36,000 wild horses roam would increase from 33 million to 53 million -- an area larger than New York and New England put together, or about 10 square miles per horse. Horse lovers have been adopting the animals to save them from being put down, but in this economy, such adoptions have dramatically declined.

Advocates of the bill say it could actually save money by reducing the amount spent on keeping the horses in pens.

"It's not good for the horses and it's wasting money, frankly," said Rep. Jim Moran, D-Va. Rep. Raul Grijalva, D-Ariz., called the current program "terribly ineffective."

But foes see the plan as a clear drain on taxpayer dollars. The new bill would provide millions for contraception, rounding up thousands of animals each year for castration and even birth control pills. The Congressional Budget Office estimated it would cost about $200 million over the next five years, and up to $500 million after 2013 to secure the additional land.

"This is bad environmental policy. It's bad grass policy," said Rep. Cynthia Lummis, R-Wyo.

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