

David G. Barker

Vida Preciosa International, Inc. PO Box 300, Boerne, TX 78006 (830) 537-5000

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To the House Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife:

Re: **HR-669**

I am a 57-year-old graduate biologist. My career has included a wide variety of experiences working with live animals and with people. I have worked on a ranch, as a supervisor at the Dallas Zoo, and as Curator of Education at the Gladys Porter Zoo. I have worked as a field biologist, in a university museum, and as a university instructor. I have extensive, hands-on experience with a wide variety of vertebrate animals. For the past 20 years my wife and I have concentrated our own research and efforts on pythons, and we have published extensively on that topic in scientific journals and popular venues.

I write to you because of my concerns with the anti-animal proposal identified as HR-669. It is my certain knowledge that should any version of this proposal become law, it will negatively affect the lives, incomes, properties and businesses of literally millions of Americans. The direct affect of HR-669 will be tens of thousands of foreclosures and bankruptcies. It will condemn to extinction an unpredictable number of vertebrate species. It will destroy all empathy and support that the public currently feels for nature and for wildlife. It will restrict the experiences of our children with animals to television and the internet.

I can only imagine that while you on this committee must comprehend at least some of this, I suspect those committee members who support HR-669 consider its creation and promotion as being for some idealized "greater good." I assure you that you have been misled. I ask you to consider the following points:

Fact: HR-669 is an attack on the right of Americans to possess animals.

It's that simple. HR-669 is just the latest attempt to remove all animals from captivity. This action is based on no more than the beliefs and philosophy of the environmental and animal-rights movements. Arguments in favor of HR-669 are couched on the supposition of danger to ecosystems theoretically presented by nonnative vertebrate animals. However there is very little scientific data that would support the proposed actions of HR-669, particularly when the social and economic consequences of HR-669 are considered.

HR-669 can be better described as the manifestation of the basic philosophy of the environmental and animal-rights movements that captivity is an undesirable state for any animal, something akin to animal slavery, and not defensible in any circumstance. The actions of HR-669 are no more than the latest attempt of these activist groups to force their beliefs on all American citizens.

Fact: HR-669 will cause bankruptcies and foreclosures.

The animal business generates TENS OF BILLIONS OF DOLLARS in the American economy. HR-669 in any form will cause unemployment and devastating economic loss to hundreds of thousands of Americans.

Fact: The “animal business” is networked and interlaced with many other businesses.

There are companies that make food, sell food, distribute food, grow and harvest food. The snake business relies on the rodent business which relies on the feed mill which buys from the farmer. The snake business buys equipment manufactured in the USA by American workers; they buy steel from steel distributors and plastic cages from plastic molding companies that buy raw plastic from American chemical companies. The snake business buys ceramic water bowls manufactured in China, shipped in cargo containers to the American docks, and distributed across the country by American distributors. People attending animal shows and sales stay in hotels, eat in restaurants, and buy gas to drive home.

There are thousands of businesses, each with dozens of employees that manufacture aquariums, air pumps, bird cages, hay feeders, heat pads, specialty light bulbs, and countless other items of the equipment that supports the animal business.

HR-669 will devastate countless Americans who own or are employed by the businesses and industries that rely on the animal business.

Fact: HR-669 will take away the rights of people to have pets.

Other than dogs and cats, pets and other captive animals will be banned by HR-669. As many as one hundred million Americans will lose their animals. Tens of thousands of American small businesses will be destroyed.

True, government officials will not go door-to-door collecting pets, but under HR-669, pet owners will not be able to buy, sell, breed, transport, or import any animals, including animals held at the time the law takes effect.

HR-669 is the most dictatorial and offensive piece of legislation ever read in Congress that regards animals or the environment.

Fact: All nonnative species will be banned.

While HR-669 doesn't specifically name even one species, it effectively bans every single species of animal unless it has been placed on a “white list.” That list will be generated by USF&W Service three years after HR-669 goes into effect. Until that time, EVERY ANIMAL may not be bought, sold, transported, bred, imported or exported.

In a bizarre twist, no species can be added to the white list unless it can be proven that it will not become an invasive species. Of course, it is logically impossible to prove a negative—no one can PROVE that a species will not become invasive. So apparently the white list will be a very short list.

In fact, it is my understanding that USF&W does not currently have the manpower or the expertise to successfully take on the task of creating and maintaining the white list. And just exactly how are they going to undertake the creation of this list? How will it be decided which of the thousands of species that are legally imported will be “evaluated”—flip coins?

In other words, the action of HR-669 is to grant to the government sweeping authority to confiscate the property rights of Americans. *Americans will lose billions of dollars of property, equity and business without recompense.*

Fact: Animals already in the possession of American citizens WILL NOT be grandfathered, and made exempt from the law.

I heard from the staffs of several members of this Subcommittee when I placed calls to voice my position on HR-669 to those legislators, “don't worry, this law won't affect you, you can still have all your animals.” In fact, as the law is written, either they did not understand, or they were lying. There are NO provisions or exceptions that would exempt animals already legally in this country from the draconian measures dictated by HR-669.

Yes, perhaps I could keep them, but all of my rights to them will have been confiscated by the Government. I will not be allowed to breed them, sell them, or transport them. I will not be able to import or export animals.

Fact: This bill, as written, will shut down the pet industry overnight, and it will stop the work of zoos, aquariums, and research facilities. It will destroy viable captive colonies of hundreds of vertebrate species now established in captivity. It will destroy some of the most important conservation projects accomplished in the past decades.

The people who wrote and now support HR-669 show only despicable hubris and arrogance in the incredible scope and effects of this law. In essence, on the day that this proposal becomes law, all Americans lose their rights to possess animals, whatever their reasons, and those rights are transferred to a small group of people united in their belief that it is THEIR way that is the correct way, and all else be damned.

It is crystal-clear that HR-669 requires the Government to confiscate the property rights of citizens and organizations to their animals, but everything else from that point on becomes hazy. The proposed scheme to fund this law is woefully inadequate. HR-669 will cost taxpayers billions dollars to solve a problem that is largely imaginary. There is no white list and no promise of what species will be on the white list, no adequate funding to create the white list, no funding to expand the multiple agencies that will be charged with enforcing various aspects of this law, no provisions for the hundreds of millions of animals that will be orphaned by this law—this law is tyranny at its worst, disguised as “environmental responsibility.”

Fact: Not all “exotic” species are “invasive” species.

In fact, most aren't. The terms “exotic species,” “alien species,” “non-indigenous species,” and “nonnative species” are interchangeable. They refer to any species that is not native to the ecosystem. An “invasive species” is a nonnative species that has demonstrated harm or the likelihood of harm to the economy, the environment, or to human health where it is introduced.

Only a small percentage of vertebrate animals legally imported into this country have become established exotic species; a very small percentage of that group can by any definition be considered to be invasive.

Invasion biologists often purposely misuse the term “invasive” when it suits their purposes. For example, it is common to hear the Burmese python in South Florida referred to as an “invasive species” when, in keeping with their own definition, invasion biologists should correctly refer to the Burmese python as an “exotic species.” Yes, it is a big exotic snake species that has become established in South Florida over the past 30 years, but to date there is no evidence or proof that the presence of Burmese pythons has caused harm to either the environment or to human health.

Fact: The publication of the Defenders of Wildlife titled *Broken Screens* is a report, not a scientific paper—it contains NO science.

I have seen this publication referenced as the “scientific” document on which HR-669 is based. However, *Broken Screens* is a report that is biased in its support of the environmental and animal-rights agenda to remove all nonnative animals from the possession of American citizens. *Broken Screens* is an anecdotal narrative, an argument designed to support a foregone conclusion. There are serious logical and statistical problems with the information that is presented and the conclusions that are drawn.

The most concise summary of *Broken Screens* is that during the 5 year period of 2000–2004, a total of 2,241 species of animals were imported to the United States. This included some 302 nonnative species that are identified by the authors as posing the risk of invading ecosystems or spreading disease.

The list of 302 species is the primary evidence supporting the contention that “screens” that should filter out and stop the import of “dangerous” species are broken and in need of dramatic change. Of course, HR-669 is exactly the “screen” that is proposed by the report. A critical examination of the 302 species identified as hazardous gives some impression of the lack of the validity of *Broken Screens*.

Fact: The majority of the animal species on the list identified in *Broken Screens* as presenting the potential of invasiveness or disease are included only to pad the list.

I doubt that there are many who are familiar with all the species on the list of 302, and what possible risks they might pose. However, most people with any interest in nature and animals are surely familiar with carp, goldfish, pigeons, starlings, parakeets, axis deer, Nile tilapia, scarlet macaws, guppies, house geckos, iguanas, day geckos, chameleons, largemouth bass, English sparrows, brown anoles, and spiny softshells. These species on the list of 302 are either native to the USA, or are already widespread and so solidly established in the USA as to now be considered as part of our native fauna. They are established exotic species, most with no noted tendencies to be destructive or invasive. They do not belong on the list and serve only to inflate the numbers. Any effect due to the presence of these species in North America will be absolutely unaffected by the actions of HR-669.

Are we Americans really worried about being invaded by ostriches, emus, camels, two species of gnu, pygmy hedgehogs, llamas, alpacas, hyacinth macaws, wallabies, turtles and tortoises, grass snakes, several species of giant chameleons, flamingos, greater kudu, tawny owls, mud turtles, gold-dust day geckos, penguins or chinchillas? The list is padded with these species and many other similarly ridiculous entries.

The list is further inflated with the inclusion of 40 species of psittacines birds (parrots) that are either banned from import by the Wild Bird Conservation Act of 1992, or have been legally maintained in captivity inside the USA for decades. All of the 13 species of amphibians on the list pose little or no imaginable real risk to the USA—most are absolutely innocuous; several species are endangered in nature and maintained by the international Amphibian Ark conservation project.

Twelve species of bats, mongooses, and rodents on the list of 302 are already on the Injurious Wildlife List of the Lacey Act and are banned from import or possession.

Consider that peacocks and ferrets have both been in captivity in the USA for about two centuries. Is there some reason why we Americans should suddenly fear parakeets, cockatiels, guinea pigs, angel fish, goldfish, mollies, swordtails, zebra finches, peach-faced lovebirds, and multiple species of ducks and geese? These are all common captives, pets and companion animals.

The list of 302 suspect species is heavily padded with questionable, even ridiculous species in order to support the many unfounded contentions and predictions in *Broken Screens*; any critical examination of the report makes clear it is written to support the agenda of the severely misguided environmental and animal-rights movements.

Fact: More than half of the species that are on the list of “grandfathered” animals exempt from HR-669 are considered to be invasive species.

Written into HR-669 is the following list of animals that are exempt: cats, dogs, cattle, chickens, donkeys, geese, horses, ducks, goats, goldfish, llamas, mules, pigs, rabbits, and sheep.

Of these favored species, the following are considered to be invasive species in areas of the United States, or are identified as species of concern in *Broken Screens*—cats, dogs, donkeys, horses, geese, ducks, goats, goldfish, llamas, and pigs.

It also is written that other species “determined by the Secretary to be common and clearly domesticated” can be exempted from HR-669. I wonder if ball pythons would be granted that status—there are somewhere between a half-million to a million in American homes, they are selectively bred for color and beauty, and they are not an invasive species like most of the grandfathered list.

Fact: Invasive species are a real concern. However, an insignificant number of vertebrate animals that are legally imported and declared to USF&W upon entry have become problematic invasives.

The most common and the most deleterious invasive species are plants, not animals. Only a fraction of a percent of vertebrate species has ever become invasive.

The best known and most harmful invasive animal species are invertebrates that have been inadvertently introduced to America—fire ants, Africanized bees, zebra mussels, woolly adelgids, Asian longhorn beetles, Formosa termites, gypsy moths, Mediterranean fruit flies, and many others—HR-669 will have no effect on these types of accidental introductions.

Fact: This bill will take animals from our children and their children.

In a society without animals, future generations will feel no empathy or concern for animals they have never experienced. People cannot love that which is unknown, or that which they have been taught to fear. All support for nature, for zoos and national parks, for environmental groups, for refuges, for wildlife conservation—all of this will wither and die in a world devoid of animals. Our children and grandchildren will know the diversity of life only from television and the internet—breathless, two-dimensional caricatures of living things beyond comprehension.

It apparently is the agenda of the environmental movement to someday completely remove all animals from captivity, and from the human experience. This will be the result of HR-669. How can you possibly believe this is to be a reasonable action?

HR-669 will negatively affect literally millions of Americans and **the cost to the American economy will be measured in the tens of billions of dollars.** It is tyrannical, offensive, anti-conservation, anti-education, and anti-American.

Please do not support HR-669.

Sincerely

David G. Barker