

Testimony Concerning HB 6955
Environment Committee - March 11, 2015
Jennifer Wynn

I would like to thank the Environment Committee for the opportunity to express my support of HB 6955: AN ACT PROHIBITING THE SALE AND TRADE OF IVORY AND RHINOCEROS HORN.

The world knows that elephants and rhinos are more endangered than ever. Every year, significant numbers are brutally massacred for their tusks and horns. Poachers leave behind orphaned babies and the bodies of deceased mothers. I care about these endangered animals, and want to see future generations – your children and mine – have the ability to appreciate elephants and rhinos. If we don't act, that will not be possible.

We are at serious risk of losing these species forever. Adding insult to injury, profits from these sales often go to fund terrorist groups that would seek to harm our national interests.

I feel that humans bear responsibility to prevent their extinction, and protect them from those groups who seek to exploit them for financial gain. Cruel and inhumane poaching of these thinking and feeling animals is morally wrong.

There is a growing body of research on elephant cognition, and to think that they should be massacred in such cruel ways is horrifying. I have seen the expression of their intelligence firsthand in 2007. I went to South Africa, where I visited the Pilanesberg Reserve, west of the capital city of Pretoria. The Pilanesberg is home to a myriad of indigenous African mammals, including elephants and rhinoceros. Visitors are free to drive about the trails of the park at their leisure. The safari experience requires a keen eye to watch on either sides of the trail for the herds. I was so lucky, and able to see 9 rhinos, and a herd of elephants. I will never forget the experience of seeing these animals up close, free to roam about the 221 square miles of natural African landscape. My friend, a local from Johannesburg, told me that I was indeed lucky to see so many rhino; even she was surprised due to their rarity.

The experience of seeing the elephants was incredible as well. There was a herd crossing the road ahead, so half a dozen cars had to stop and wait for them to finish. There were a number of baby elephants in the herd, and I'll never forget one of the adults stopping to face the cars until the babies had safely cleared the area. The adult let out a fair growl, warning us while she waited for the juveniles to cross. It was absolutely a clear moment of her protecting her family from the unknown dangers of waiting cars. In the distance we could see the elephants standing near one another, their large ears touching, behaving tenderly toward one another.

You can read extensively in respectable outlets, about babies of slain rhinoceros and elephants, crying inconsolably at the loss of their mothers. You can read about the cognitive marvels that scientists are learning that elephants truly are. For my personal take, I have seen the spirit and expressiveness of these animals, and feel very strongly that we have a moral obligation to do all we can to protect these innocent and wondrous creatures. We need to prohibit the sale of rhino horn and elephant tusk, to stop incentivizing their massacre.

Thank you for giving me an opportunity to testify and I do hope you will strongly support this important piece of legislation.

Thank you,

Jennifer Wynn
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