

Opening Statement by Congressman Tom McClintock  
Ranking Member, Sub-Committee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
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We meet today to consider HR 2245 that attempts to severely constrict the importation of animal trophies in an attempt to discourage trophy hunting. As we will hear from the nations directly affected, the practical effect of the bill will remove the incentives to preserve endangered species on the African continent.

I have a confession to make. I'm not a hunter. I don't understand its appeal and never have. This isn't a moral judgment: I don't understand the appeal of stamp collecting either. It's just not my thing.

As a consumer, I like steak, but I don't think I could slaughter a cow either. But I'm awfully glad that others can and regularly do. We slaughter 39 million cows and calves in this country every year. They should be on the endangered species list, because at this rate, cows should be extinct in this country by next year. Yet we never seem to run out of cows and calves. That's because they have value, and that very value is what provides the incentive to breed them and care for them.

The danger occurs when we run afoul of what economists call the "tragedy of the commons." If no one owns them, then everyone has a perverse incentive to over-use them. In those cases, regulation becomes an important part of sustainability. Too many takings and the species can be threatened with extinction. But also, too few takings can doom a species to morbid overcrowding and overpopulation which nature then regulates through disease, starvation and mass die-offs.

My concern with this bill is that it doesn't make these distinctions. I understand the passions behind it. As Ben Franklin warned, "Passion governs, but she never governs wisely."

So in this case, I wish we would pay attention to the governments of Zimbabwe, Tanzania and the other African nations in whose affairs we are meddling.

As they will tell us, they highly depend on healthy animal populations for a significant part of their economic development and revenues. They have every incentive to protect these populations and have extensive programs to do so.

As they will tell us, regulated trophy hunting is a central part of that equation, and a major source of the incentives and revenues they need to maintain these populations. IF we collapse trophy hunting, we destroy the very incentives and revenues that underpin their conservation efforts.

Trophy hunting places a high value on these animals, incentivizing land owners and governments to maintain the habitats necessary to support healthy populations so that they can be harvested. If we collapse trophy hunting, there's no incentive to maintain these habitats.

Trophy hunting produces major revenues for these governments to support their conservation programs. This bill would cut off those revenues.

Where trophy hunting is legal and regulated, the incentives to combat illegal poaching are immense – illegal poaching is a direct threat to the commerce generated by legal hunting. If we collapse legal hunting, the economic incentive to combat illegal poaching collapses too.

Because trophy hunting is legal, it can be monitored and regulated to assure the sustainable management of these populations for all time. If we make the trade of trophies illegal, we forfeit our ability to regulate this trade and give it to the underground market. At the same time we promote poaching as a more viable alternative to regulated and licensed takings.

The colonial attitude toward Africa has always been that we know better than the African nations of what is good for them. On this basis, the American left has sought to deny them cheap energy sources necessary to lift them out of poverty, and on this basis, it would catastrophically disrupt the extensive African conservation practices that are contributing to a sustainable development of their natural resources.

Please listen to and respect the government of Zimbabwe, speaking for the 23 African nations that depend on hunting for their conservation programs and their economic development, when it tells us:

“Progressive countries like the United States are expected to play a leading role in promoting activities that benefit conservation and humanity rather than enacting laws that will prejudice other sovereign countries like Zimbabwe of our benefits from good conservation practices...When we do well in conserving wildlife, we do not expect to receive penalties and punishments from our most important trade partner (USA)...Don't you think that by enacting the proposed CECIL Act, which is based on unrealistic and philosophical ideologies is disempowering governments and local communities? Indeed that will be another form of violating our human rights...”