

H.R. 669 Hearing Update

What's the status of H.R. 669 after the hearing?

By Benjamin Weiner

On Thursday, April 23, 2009, the Subcommittee on Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife met to deliberate, investigate and revise H.R. 669, the Nonnative Wildlife Invasion Prevention Act, and decide if it should go to general debate and move forward in the legislative process. The hearing record is being held open for 10 days for responses and to decide whether to proceed.

Chief Executive Officer and General Counsel for the Pet Industry Joint Advisory Council (PIJAC) Marshall Meyers testified before the Congressional Subcommittee regarding H.R. 669 as a representative of pet owners and the pet industry.

In written testimony submitted to the Subcommittee Meyers stated, "We support the development of a strategic, risk-based process to prevent the introduction of invasive species (harmful nonnative species) into the United States." However, the current draft of H.R. 669 "fails to be strategic in that it does not adequately take socio-economic issues and risk management options into account," and would "require funds and staffing not currently available, nor likely to be available, to the US Fish and Wildlife Service."

Meyers said that they are willing to work with the authors of the bill to craft more realistic legislation that serves the public and affected industries alike.

Congresswoman and Subcommittee Chairwoman Madeleine Bordallo of Guam (who authored this bill) said, "We recognize the bill is by no means perfect and that changes will be needed to address various concerns before any legislation moves forward."

"As it stands, PIJAC still has issues with points of this bill's impracticality or lack of clarity," Meyers said.

Andrew Wyatt President of the United States Association of Reptile Keepers (USARK) said that the hearing was a "smashing success."

"Two weeks leading up to the hearing, USARK mounted a grassroots campaign of letter writing and phone calls," he said. "We swamped Capitol Hill with almost 50,000 letters that were delivered to Subcommittee members."

Wyatt added that on top of that were thousands upon thousands of phone calls, e-mail and letters directly to Subcommittee members.

During the hearing, Congressman and Subcommittee member Henry E. Brown of South Carolina said, "Like members of this Subcommittee, during the past few weeks I have received thousands of calls, e-mails and letters written by constituents in strong opposition of this bill."

Later, Wyatt quoted Harry Burroughs of the Subcommittee staff as saying, "I haven't seen a letter writing campaign like this in 30 years! You should be proud of yourselves."

Subcommittee member Eni F.H. Faleomavaega of American Samoa, a co-sponsor of the bill, congratulated Meyers, PIJAC and the pet industry for the tremendous grassroots response that has been generated, noting that it is important to have input from constituents on these issues.

Wyatt added that Faleomavaega said that the letters and phone calls hit them like a "buzz saw."

"We're so proud of all the people out there that did what they were supposed to do and sent letters and e-mails and phone calls," he said.

Russ Case, Editor of Aquarium Fish International and FishChannel.com, expressed relief at the outcome. "I'm happy that the bill may be in trouble in its current form, but as we all know, the groups who are against the keeping of exotic pets will return with another. For now I'm cautiously optimistic, but I'll be waiting to see what they cook up next."



Both PIJAC and USARK expressed that no current action is required by the public and that more updates are to come.

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