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STATEMENT BY
THE HONORABLE HENRY E. BROWN, JR.,
RANKING REPUBLICAN MEMBER,
AT THE
JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE OVERSIGHT HEARING ON
“HOW TO CONSTRICT SNAKES AND OTHER INVASIVE SPECIES”
MARCH 23, 2010

Mr. Chairman, I want to compliment you for scheduling this hearing on constrictor snakes. However, I also want to express my deep disappointment that the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who has proposed the Lacey Act listing, and the U. S. Geological Survey, which wrote the underlying report, are not testifying today.

Let me say at the outset that I am sure there are a number of Americans who do not view constrictor snakes as warm or cuddly animals. Nevertheless, there are millions of Americans who own pythons and Boa constrictors. They believe, as I do, that what Secretary Salazar has proposed is unprecedented in its scope, potentially catastrophic in its economic impact and likely to result in a range of unintended consequences.

While every member of the House would strongly support effective efforts to eradicate these snakes from the Florida Everglades, there are certain fundamental issues that must be addressed. These include: whether the Lacey Act is the best approach to solving what is now a localized problem in South Florida, how stopping the interstate and foreign trade of these nine snake species is going to solve this problem and whether the federal government should compensate those who now own affected snakes that they legally acquired.

One thing is clear. Sometime later this year, these nine constrictor snake species will be listed as “injurious” under the Lacey Act and the 2 million breeding snakes in this country – many of which are pythons or boas – with a current economic value of \$800 million – will be worth nothing.

Americans now legally own about 2.5 million snakes. There are more than 3,800 retail pets stores, including a number in South Carolina, that sell Boa constrictors. There are also thousands of snake breeders, suppliers and yes even airlines that account for \$1.8 billion each year in sales and revenues. How is putting these thousands of Americans out of work and destroying thousands of small businesses going to eradicate Burmese pythons in South Florida.

While I understand the Secretary's announcement was political popular in Florida, if you are one of the thousands of constrictor snake breeders in the United States, how are you likely to respond to a Lacey Act listing. Well, you have three choices. You can continue to spending thousands of dollars each year to feed, care for and maintain what has now become your pets. You can humanely destroy these two million snakes. Or, you can do the unthinkable by releasing them into the wild. The net effect of that action, if USGS is correct, is that we could have reproducing populations of these huge constrictor snakes, not just in South Florida, but in regions throughout the country.

During the next few months, it is my hope that the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service will carefully review the comments it receives on the proposed rule, it will do a better job of evaluating the real economic impact and real economic losses to thousands of small businesses and it will try to develop an effective strategy to deal with each and every unintended consequence.

At a time when we are still experiencing 9.7 percent unemployment and with more than 14.9 million unemployed Americans, it is frankly inconceivable that this Administration would either intentionally or unintentionally destroy thousands of additional American jobs. Yet, this is exactly what the Lacey Act listing will accomplish. I would hope that the Small Business Administration is paying attention to this proposal and will fight for America's small businesses in this case.

I look forward to hearing from our distinguished witnesses and an explanation of how listing these species under the Lacey Act will solve the serious problem in South Florida — which by the way — the Fish and Wildlife Service has said: 'Eradicating this invasive species is no longer feasible.'