

**Statement of Roger E. Oerter**  
**Major, USAF, retired.**  
**Before the House Insular Affairs, Oceans and Wildlife Subcommittee**  
**The Committee on Natural Resources**  
**September 22, 2009**

Madam Chairwoman, Members of the Committee, I am here today as a voter and a citizen who has suffered a taking of my property because of federal regulatory action. I appreciate the opportunity today to tell my story.

I was a Major on active duty with the US Air Force in 2007 when I decided to pursue the hunt of a life time – the polar bear. I took out a home equity line of credit on my home and booked a hunt for late April, 2008. This hunt, which remains entirely legal under Canadian law, was to be a retirement present to myself. Though I could ill afford a trip of such expense, I rationalized it as a once-in-a-lifetime luxury following a 29-year military career.

The hunt costs have totaled over \$41,000 (thus far), nearly half of my 2008 annual military salary, but a figure for which I was willing to go into debt; as I've always wanted to experience and enjoy one of the world's few remaining adventures—a dog-sled hunt north of the Arctic Circle. Besides the adventure, I knew that my participation in this hunt would help conserve the bear population and provide sorely needed funds to the Inuit people.

I was elated to have success on this arduous and challenging hunt on the 1st of May, having seen 39 bears in ten days. I hope you understand, I wanted to bring home my bear to create a taxidermy mount as a memento of this amazing experience. So I arranged for its transport back to the United States before leaving Canada. I had submitted my paperwork to the US Fish and Wildlife Service for a mandatory 30-day review period when the Interior Department listed the polar bear as “threatened” under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). As a result of their decision, US hunters are now banned from importing these legally-harvested polar bears into the US under the Marine Mammal Protection Act. With that, I basically lost my investment in this trip. While I'll never lose the experience, the polar bear mount which would have been my lasting trophy cannot happen under current laws, and this regulation effectively confiscated my polar bear. Right now, the bear hide and skull are in cold storage in Edmonton. I can't throw good money after bad by having the taxidermy work done in Canada, and yet the longer the hide sits unmounted in storage, the greater the risk that the hide will be ruined. I find it distressing that the government required me to abide by a 30-day review period before importation, but itself instantaneously changed its import policy.

As a veteran of ten contingency deployments during my Air Force career, including Operations SOUTHERN WATCH (4 times), JOINT FORGE/JOINT GUARDIAN (1), ENDURING FREEDOM-PHILIPPINES (2) and IRAQI FREEDOM (3); I am asking you

support enactment of HR 1054. This simple bill will do only one thing—it will allow me and the other 42 similarly affected bear hunters in this country to import the bears we legally hunted. It will not change the ESA listing. It will not allow future bear imports. It will simply restore my property to my possession.

I ask you to support efforts to lift the restriction on polar bear importation at very least. It makes no sense in regards to conservation or science. In the long run the bears will suffer, as the Canadian government will still issue permits, but with no monetary value attached to them, the natives will have no incentive to take only mature males, as is currently done. The hunting will be solely for subsistence, and females will be taken more often.

This issue is not about hunting. It's a simple matter of returning property that was effectively taken by regulatory action. I made an enormous investment in my polar bear expedition and the government has effectively stripped me of my property. This is a deeply personal issue that has had an enormous impact on me. I sincerely hope you will consider, co-sponsor, and support enactment of HR 1054.

I would like to thank the Dallas Safari Club in assisting me in my effort to testify today and appreciate the position the Club has taken to help move this legislation forward.

Madam Chairwoman, thank you once again for the opportunity to tell my story to the Committee. I appreciate your careful consideration of this legislation.