

Good morning. My name is Ashley McAvey and I live in Shelburne, Vermont. I am extremely grateful to you, Chairman Deen and your Committee for your time and careful consideration. Additional thanks to Representative Wright and Representative Lenes for taking the lead with this bill, to the many co-sponsors who have signed it, and to Didi Brush for helping me plan today.

For the first four years of my life, I grew up in a small town called Ivoryton, Connecticut—a place that was home to the two largest American ivory manufacturers and which held a monopoly over all ivory products in the U.S. in the late 1800s. I grew up aware of this background and the fact that the wealth and prosperity of my hometown was centered on the extreme exploitation of a species.

When I was 16 I traveled to Zimbabwe where I saw my first elephant in the wild. If you have ever seen an elephant in the wild, I assure you, it is one of life's greatest gifts. During that trip, I became aware of the plight of these majestic creatures as well as the spectacular rhinos. My time in Africa began a lifelong devotion to and exploration of the animals, the people who are their stewards, and the extreme crisis on all of our hands now.

With an undergraduate degree in Environmental Biology and a Master in Environmental Management (both from Yale), I have spent years learning about this crisis from the most revered experts in the world. I have taken apart the complexities of this issue, spoken at length to business owners, spearheaded a 300 person elephant event at UVM's Rubenstein School, and worked to assemble a team both present today and represented in the Public Comment, all to show you the facts so that you can make the most informed decision possible.

You are all aware of the poaching epidemic so I will only touch on this again to say that one elephant is slaughtered for its tusks every 15 minutes. 96 elephants a day. They are being killed faster than they are reproducing—putting them on the fast-track to extinction. This is real. This is a fact. When an animal is being killed faster than it reproduces, the entire species will—not may—go extinct. Experts argue whether that will be 5 years from now or 10—but this, they do not argue: unless decisive and complete action is taken, elephants in the wild will be gone forever, not just in our lifetime, but soon in our lifetime.

To also understand the brutality of the killing, one must be aware of the methods—AK47s, poisoned watermelons, cyanide dumped in watering holes (thereby killing entire ecosystems in the process), the hacking off of tusks while elephants are still alive, paralysis darts so the elephant or rhino cannot move yet is fully cognizant of machetes slicing into its skulls, and poisoned darts leading to weeks and weeks of extreme suffering before a long, unspeakable death.

We must also understand who is doing the killing. What may have once been a way for a poor farmer to feed his family by selling tusks, poaching has become killing on an industrialized scale and by the world's worst militia and terrorist groups. The \$1.4 billion ivory trade feeds crime syndicates. Political instability and corruption across Africa have made the enormous profits from the ivory black market a viable source for funding military resistance groups such as al-Shabaab, Janjaweed, Lord's Resistance Army, and Boko Haram. The fact is, buying ivory—old or new-- puts money into the hands of the worst people in the world. As long as there is a value on ivory, the killing will continue.

What I want to speak to you about more than anything, however, is what you will hear from the opposition and to explain to you why their arguments are flawed.

First, you will hear that this is little more than a progressive agenda. Gov. Chris Christie, New Jersey's Republican governor and the first in this nation to sign a full state ban last year, John Kerry, Hillary Clinton and any number of prominent leaders on both sides of the aisle agree that this has nothing to do with party or politics and everything to do with global security and averting the extinction of an iconic species.

Next, you will hear that this sweeping grassroots movement is really only about gun control, as the trade ban will prevent the very small percentage of sales of guns with ivory inlays. I would respond that it is about guns just as much as it is about statuettes and bangles and trinkets. You will hear that it is action against hunting. Again, an absolute falsehood.

You will hear that the complete ban will hurt businesses and innocent people here in our state—that it will, and I quote from an opponent in Vermont, deliver an “undue burden onto businesses”. To examine that, I have spent considerable personal time contacting businesses in New Jersey where the full ban is in effect. What better way to see the potential effects on

Vermont businesses than to see first-hand what it has done to our exact counterparts in New Jersey.

My findings? I, nor any of my colleagues, has been able to find a single business that has gone out of business because of the complete ban. Of the gun shops I called, few even carried guns with ivory handles. When asked if the ban affected business, one New Jersey gun shop said, and I quote, “not in the least”. Of the antique shops I spoke with, some expressed increased business given the public approval from no longer selling ivory.

As the General Manager of one of the largest antique stores in the tri-state area, Jim Castelli relating to Vermont stated, “we are glad to finally see this major issue being taken seriously. We have banned all ivory sales in our stores even before the law passed in New Jersey and now want to partner with you on getting this bill passed to do the same for Vermont.” He goes on to say that elephant tusks are theirs, not ours to sell.

I also called one of the most respected piano dealers in New Jersey. While becoming compliant did cost the business money, they had 6 months to do so (a delayed enactment that Vermont would propose as well), they are still in business, they are fully compliant, and they now want this legislation to pass in Vermont so that there is a level playing field for all.

Taking my research to Vermont, I called one of the largest antique dealers here in Vermont and the owner told me immediately that even without this law on the books yet, they do not sell ivory in their shop and he was well aware of the poaching crisis. In a search for gun shops that carry a majority of guns with ivory handles, I was not able to find one. I also spoke to two Vermont piano repairmen who—while not expressly endorsing H.297-- both independently of the other said that a ban would likely increase their business for the retrofitting that would need to take place before the sale of an older piano should someone choose to sell an old piano and not simply keep it or pass it down.

In short, you will hear this bill will devastate and cripple business. You will hear it will hurt innocent people just trying to make a living. These arguments are flawed. And referring to the opposition’s statement of “undue burden onto businesses,” I would like to suggest that that business owner look into the eyes of the family of an African ranger—often the sole income earner for his family-- shot dead trying to protect these animals and compare his “undue burden” to theirs.

You will hear that the ban will not fix the problem. Wrong again. In 1989 after the worldwide ban on ivory imports, poaching plummeted, prices of ivory dropped, and elephant populations rebound. When legal trade is abolished, demand dries up, the money goes away, and elephants have a chance. Solutions exist to human-wildlife conflicts; extinction has no solution.

And you will hear the argument, “How can the sale of this 100 year old ivory antique stop an elephant from being killed today?” Because trade in ivory is trade in ivory is trade in ivory. Attaching any value to ivory is a green light for trade. Up to 90% of antique ivory is actually recently killed ivory. Jim Castelli stated, “The bill banning ivory should be welcomed by antique dealers in Vermont since it will provided clarity where right now the law is unclear. We have all witnessed ivory coming in our stores as antiques, but very few are antique. Most of the ivory that shows up in antique shops is new ivory made to look old.” Even when an item is unquestionably old, giving it a legal market shows there is money to be made—and money on one end means killing on the other.

Another opponent regarding pianos stated, “The older instruments were designed with ivory in a very different time. The use of ivory at that time has little to do with the poaching and horror of the current climate.” This statement is emphatically wrong. A legal trade in ivory—no matter the age--- has everything to do with the current climate. She continued that pianos, “are to be respected and not desecrated. They should remain available to the historical and musical community.” Indeed, I agree wholeheartedly with that statement. And just as I intend to keep this piece of ivory from a very different time, passed down to me by my grandmother, she should keep her piano, respect it, and pass it on to her grandchildren. All H.297 is saying is that-- for all of the reasons you are hearing today—the piano quite simply cannot be sold until the ivory is replaced.

I remind you of the dozens of ivory crushes that have taken place around the world—including China which crushed 6.1 tons of ivory, but only after the U.S. first did so. Some people said, “What a waste! Beautiful sculptures and raw ivory being crushed! Now the price of ivory is even higher!” Wrong—what the crushes are showing is that ivory has no value unless it is attached to an elephant. Period.

What likely trumps all of these flawed arguments, however, is that you will be hearing them from sales people. You will be hearing them from people who stand to lose some business or spend some money to become compliant or—in the majority of cases—be inconvenienced. The decades I have put into trying to understand this situation have put me in contact with the leading experts in the world. People on the ground. People in Africa who have watched an elephant take its last breath or a rhino succumb to death after weeks of trying to survive or a park ranger being killed trying to protect these animals or a safari guide business going out of business because there is no wildlife to be seen. I share part of a recent email from a safari operator in Kenya:

*Poaching of elephants has caused a huge impact on tourism for many years. Tourism which is the number one source of revenue for Kenya has drastically gone down due to poaching...I have many times run into dead elephants on safari which were slaughtered by poachers some of which we had seen and filmed the previous day. As a result many of my guests promised never to return after seeing the dead elephants...This is a big impact to local people. Poaching is a rampant issue that needs to be dealt with much vigour and strictness.*

Along with the animals, these are the real victims living this horror on a daily basis. These are the real burdens and sacrifices.

The reality is greed is what has brought us to this point. And greed to continue a legal trade—any legal trade—is what will mean the end of the elephants. If this bill dies or is made ineffective by amendments and exemptions and elephants go extinct, no amount of regret will allow us to redo this. This is black and white—there is no longer the luxury of a gray area—and New Jersey knew that unequivocally.

In closing, why is this decision in your hands so critical and why are all eyes on Vermont right now? A National Geographic article that was released two days ago puts the spotlight on the importance of the decision right here in Vermont. There are 25 states—fully one half of this nation—watching to see what Vermont will do. Will we stand with New Jersey or not. The nation is looking to Vermont. And looking to this nation is China. Vermont's role right now in this global crisis cannot be underestimated.

Vermont is not going out on a limb to pass this bill without exemptions. We would be doing what we in this state do best—we'd be doing the right thing.