

# RADIO IOWA

## Bengals & savannahs, yes. Cougars, no

by O. KAY HENDERSON on MARCH 15, 2011

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State law currently forbids lowans from owning dangerous wild animals like lions and tigers, but a bill pending in the legislature would let lowans have two rather large cats as pets.

The Iowa Senate has voted to allow lowans to have bengal and savannah cats in their homes. Senator Joe Seng, a Democrat from Davenport, is a veterinarian who sponsored legislation four years ago to address growing problems with dangerous wild animals.

"You could go on the Internet, see a bunch of wild animals that were trying to be sold for maybe \$2,000 or \$3,000," Seng says. "There were like lion cubs. They were cuddly. You could actually push on the video and see these cute little lion cubs. The problem is when these animals go older, people wouldn't know what to do with them. Nobody wanted a wild tiger living next to them."

But Seng has now shepherded a bill through the state senate which grants an exemption for big cats known as savannahs. "It's actually the great-great-grandparent of a serval, so actually it's down to about six to 10 percent of actually of the wild animal," Seng says, "The same on the Asian leopard cat, which becomes a bengal after four generations of breeding." lowans would be able to legally own both bengals and savannahs if Seng's bill becomes law.

Seng told his senate colleagues there's never a guarantee that any animal will be docile. "Any cat can possibly be dangerous," Seng says. "I think the instance in Bellevue where the horse stampeded and killed a person, I mean any animal can be dangerous. I don't think these cats will be."

The bill passed on a 49-1 vote. However, just before the voting, one senator jokingly asked Seng if the bill outlawed cougars. The word cougar has become slang for an older woman who dates younger men. Seng didn't take the bait, however, and explained bengals and savannahs are not descendants of cougars.

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