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The Rifle Subsidy

In his reply to Senator Kennedy of Massachusetts Secretary of Defense McNamara failed to meet the central issue of the Government-subsidized national rifle matches.

Secretary McNamara admirably expressed his personal dismay at the failure of Congress to enact gun-control legislation. But he did not respond to Senator Kennedy's suggestion that he cancel the national rifle matches because of the high cost of the war in Vietnam. These matches, which run for a month, cost the Defense Department \$3 million a year.

This amounts to a subsidy to the National Rifle Association, since only its members can compete. The Government not only makes available a military base as the site of this contest but also pays for the contestants' travel expenses, lodging and meals. Throughout the year National Rifle Association members are also entitled to free ammunition, the loan of military weapons, and the right to buy others at cost.

This little-known subsidy serves no useful defense purpose. The sportsmen who participate in this form of recreation can well afford to organize their rifle matches under private auspices just as golfers, swimmers and other sportsmen pay for their own hobbies. Senator Kennedy is entirely right in asserting that it would make much more sense to use Camp Perry, the site of this year's matches, as a recreation center for the slum children of Toledo and Cleveland.

Secretary McNamara, who has shown abundant past courage in trimming the fat out of the defense establishment, has an opportunity here. The marksmanship program and the rifle matches are a clear waste of public funds.