

## GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIZES TRAINING YOUTH IN USE OF GUNS

By JOWANDA SHELTON — BERNARD FENSTERWALD, JR.

As crazy as it may seem, while the government is attempting with its right hand to curb the sale of the "Saturday Night Special," with its left hand, it is subsidizing the building of public shooting ranges where the youth of America can become experts in the use of guns.

What really is involved is a Federal subsidy for the National Rifle Association to the tune of approximately \$16 million a year.

On Tuesday, June 17, 1975, the Subcommittee on Fisheries and Wildlife of the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee approved the earmarking of half of all federal excise taxes collected on guns, pistols, revolvers and ammunition to be used solely to train people—primarily teenagers—to fire these and other weapons. The tax monies involved amount to approximately \$16 million per year.

The Department of the Interior objected on the ground that they could not use the money at their discretion—for instance, for improvement of wildlife habitat or for the protection of wildlife on public lands under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior. Earmarking as provided by H.R. 9067 would make it mandatory for excise taxes collected on weapons to be used to train people to use firearms and to purchase, construct, and maintain shooting targets and ranges.

This in effect would mean the National Rifle Association will finally have accomplished its original purpose in sponsoring the Pittman-Robertson Act—control of tax funds for the promotion and sale of guns, rifles, and pistols. (The U.S. Code Cong. and Admin. News, 1970, 91st Congress, Second Session, p. 4357 reports: "41 State and Fish and Game Departments have hunter safety programs which are carried out in cooperation with the National Rifle Association.")

Only four organizations plus the Department of the Interior appeared to testify on the bills. To our knowledge, none of the animal protective organizations were invited to testify. The Director of the Committee for Humane Legislation learned of the hearings and because of our lobbying registration status could insist on being permitted to send a letter for inclusion in the hearing record. Other animal-interest groups are non-profit organizations and thus must be invited by the Congress to comment on legislation before doing so. We encourage taxpayers to let their Congressman know that they do not want the blood-money collected from the sale of guns used to train students to kill. (It is argued by the hunter that game animals prefer to be killed by the *trained* killer rather than an amateur. Perhaps the human also prefers the "humane" method of being killed by the "safety-trained gun-user.")

Not only are we concerned at federal monies being used to kill animals, we are concerned at the lack of interest by

Congress in the training of high school students to use guns.

F.B.I. figures show that in 1973, handguns were used in 53 percent of murders committed in the United States. Of all the persons arrested for murder 45 percent were under 25 years of age.

Sixty-three percent of all armed robbery in 1973 was committed with the use of a firearm.

Since 1968, the use of firearms to commit assaults has increased 63 percent and arrests of persons under 18 for aggravated assaults have increased 42 percent.

Building gun ranges and encouraging our youth to use guns is certainly no way to start solving our appalling crime problems.

Harry E. Shaver, employed by the Division of Law Enforcement of the West Virginia Department of Natural Resources testified at the hearings held June 17th:

"Since the inception of the Hunter Safety Program, in excess of 8,500,000 students have availed themselves of firearms safety training. The present national rate of annual increase is about 800,000 students. Any additional funds made available will result in an increase in the annual growth rate in direct proportion thereto."

And so, we can expect the numbers of people trained to use guns to grow and grow . . .

Five hundred thirty-five members of the United States Congress and a great number of wildlife organizations cannot allow themselves to be outwitted by the National Rifle Association in its crusade to encourage the sale and use of guns!

Conversely, it is now time for us to consider radical amendments to the Pittman-Robertson Act which would discourage, not encourage, the use of firearms. With the use of guns and crime at an all-time high, we cannot afford the further distribution of guns and training in their use. Both humans and animals should be permitted to expect a full and useful life without the harassment of the gun hunter—whether it be in the streets or in the woods.

The alternative is simple: It would only require that federal funds used for implementation of the "Wildlife and Fish Restoration Act" be appropriated from general funds from the National Treasury—not funds collected from the sale of guns. The Department of the Interior could then proceed to purchase and maintain habitat for wildlife and not for the training of gun-users.

Any excise tax money collected from the sale of guns could be used in a law-enforcement program aimed at phasing out gun-crimes against man and his fellow creature, the "game" animal.