

GUN-TRAINING BILL PRESSED IN HOUSE

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It Would Provide \$9-Million
for State Target Ranges
and 'Hunter Education'

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 1—A bill mandating the states to spend millions of dollars of Federal tax money each year for the construction of what critics fear will become a nationwide network of target ranges is quietly approaching the House floor.

The legislation, approved unanimously by a House subcommittee at a time when proposals to control the use of handguns are under intense debate in Congress, could greatly increase the number of persons throughout the country trained to use guns.

According to the best estimates, the bill would require the states to spend \$9.25-million in tax money each year to build target ranges or to create "hunter education" programs in conjunction with the ranges.

Since 1971 the states have spent an average of \$200,000 a year in Federal funds to build or improve 40 target ranges and to operate firearm training programs at 1,000 gun clubs. That is about 2 per cent of what would be required to be spent each year under the bill.

Money for the target-range construction would come from 11 per cent excise taxes paid by the purchasers of all firearms [including pistols and revolvers], bows and arrows and ammunition.

Federal Official Opposed

Lynn A. Greenwalt, director of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service who has opposed the mandatory requirements of the bill, said last week that a "tremendous number" of new ranges might be built if the legislation passes.

Since 1971 a total of \$412,000 in Federal tax money has been used by the states solely for range construction—an average of \$10,000 a range. These figures suggest that hundreds of new ranges could be built every year with the increased funds.

The legislation, introduced by Representative Joseph E. Karth, Democrat of Minnesota, approved by the subcommittee on Fisheries and Wildlife Conser-

vation and the Environment in mid-June. It is now before the full Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee. Lobbying strongly in favor of the bill is the National Rifle Association, which promotes hunter education programs. Representative John D. Dingell, Democrat of Michigan who is a co-sponsor, is one of 75 members of the rifle association's board of directors.

The association and other wildlife and sportsmen's groups defend the legislation on grounds that it would help insure the proper use of firearms and that the tax money would come from those who would receive the benefits.

But at least two antigun organizations—the National

Council for a Responsible Firearms Policy and the Committee for Humane Legislation—have opposed the measure. They maintain that it would strengthen the nation's "gun culture."

Crime Problem Seen

"What really is involved is a Federal subsidy of the National Rifle Association," said Bernard Fensterwald Jr. of the humane committee. "Building gun ranges and encouraging our youth to use guns is certainly no way to start solving our appalling crime problems."

David J. Steinberg of the national council said the bill "would deepen our Government's abysmal neglect of the imperatives of public safety in general and of the need for thorough reform of the nation's gun laws in particular."

Specifically, the bill would amend the Pittman-Robertson law of 1973, which has granted states excise tax money for wildlife restoration and management programs.

The law was first amended in 1971 to give states the right to use up to half of the Federal grants for hunter education and target construction. Most states, however, have continued to use the money for restoration purposes.

In recent years, the excise taxes on guns, bows and arrows, and shells and cartridges have pumped about \$12.5-million a year into wildlife programs managed by state fish and game departments.

Under the Karth bill, two substantial changes would be made in Pittman-Robertson:

The current 11 per cent excise tax would be extended to include component parts of ammunition such as primers and casings, producing an additional \$6-million a year. Half of the new \$18.5-million fund would then be mandated for hunter education and target ranges.

If a state refused to use its mandated funds, the money would be redistributed to other states. If the target range funds remained unspent after two years, the money would be used for migratory bird conservation programs.

Testifying on the bill in June, Mr. Greenwalt of the Fish and Wildlife Service did not object to the extension of taxes.

But he argued that states should not be handcuffed in their use of Federal funds.

Mr. Greenwalt said last week that an increase in the number of hunter education programs "obviously goes hand in hand" with the construction of more target ranges, which could prove costly in urban areas.