

Testimony re. S 321

Natural Resource and Energy Committee

February 27, 2020

William Young

Good morning. I appreciate the opportunity to testify today. By way of an introduction, I've lived in Vermont all of my life (74 years), with the exception of 1968-1970 when I was doing something else, courtesy of the U.S. Army. I started fishing when I was 5 and hunting when I was 8, shooting my first deer when I was 10. I was raised in the company of people who taught me to have great respect for the animals and birds that I hunted. I don't shoot anything that I don't eat. I do recognize, however, that I lived in a town, not on a farm where animals and birds could sometimes be a threat to your livelihood.

For the past 29 years I have been hunting birds with retrievers. I've hunted all over Vermont with many people. I treasure those experiences, our Vermont meadows and woods, our mountains and waterways. Every time I go out to hunt, I see something beautiful: a huge owl blinking down at me from a branch on a tree; a chick-a-dee lighting on a branch in front of my nose; a skunk trotting down through the trees towards me, followed by a line of baby skunks, assuming (correctly) that I will be the one to step aside; my retriever, all business, appearing at my feet out of heavy brush to give me a bird that fell into think brambles and cover half a football field away.

All of this represent memories and traditions that go back in this State far beyond our lifetimes, and those of our parents and grandparents. I know that Vermont has changed. It will continue to do so. It's a part of life. And that change will include changing demographics that include people who don't value hunting and some who are opposed to it. But however the demographics change, I believe that if we whittle away at our hunting traditions that are such a part of our history, we will diminish a part of who we are as a State and our heritage.

I've heard stories of inappropriate hunting practices. And I don't doubt that there are a few fools and dishonest hunters out there. But in my experience with all groups – businesses, state agencies, the legislature, hunters and anti-hunters, it's always the proverbial bell curve, with a few bad actors or incompetents at one end, a few geniuses at the other, and all the rest of us in between. And it's a mistake to enact legislation based on the fools at one end of the curve, just as it is to enact it with the assumption that everyone else are geniuses.

It seems to me that S.321 was originally intended to speak to a variety of administrative issues about our response to challenges in management of our wildlife. I don't feel qualified to speak to those issue and won't. But I do know something about hunting and hunting dogs. The provisions of the bill regarding hunting bear with dogs would result in doing away with such hunting. And the provision of the bill regarding setting certain dates as the only times one can train other dogs – in my case bird dogs – are ludicrous, and would make it impossible to do a good job of training bird dogs. You don't train bird dogs from June 1 to the end of September, or from May to June 1. You train them from January 1 to December 31.

I train them in my living room and on the stairs, in my backyard, on the Burlington golf course, on 350 acres of fields, woods and ponds in Cabot, at AKC hunt tests, on Lake Champlain and elsewhere in Vermont and other states.

I train them so that I can shoot a bird that they don't see fall a football field or more away, and I can send them towards it, periodically stopping them with a whistle and giving them hand signals to get them to it. The result is that in about 14 years I have never lost a bird, dead or wounded. Talk about a conservation effort!

And of course this would put people who are professional trainers and dog breeders out of business, since they train dogs all year as well.

So I am opposed to the provisions of the bill regarding hunting with and training dogs. I am opposed to the draconian penalties included in the bill. It seems unlikely that all of these provisions are the result of a lack of understanding or knowledge. I'm not paranoid, but I'm not a fool either. It seems clear to me that the real intent here with these provisions is to do away with hunting with dogs and, ultimately, with hunting. This is like being nibbled to death by ducks. I'd rather have a direct debate about the real issues.

I know that the Committee has to wrestle with many conflicting opinions. And you certainly have tremendous challenges to face. I am very worried about our environment, our wildlife our water and air. I don't know how we can address these without addressing climate change – an issue much bigger than our small State. I wish you well in your efforts and thank you for them.

Respectfully submitted,

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