

Hello Representative Sheldon,

I am writing to voice my concerns with some particular testimony that the committee on Environment and Energy heard in favor of Bill S. 258 on Friday April 19th. He boasts about his work “monitoring” coyote hunters in Vermont. On February 10th, 2024, he encountered a hunter in Sutton Vermont, that hunter happened to be myself and his recollection of this incident varies from what really happened as I barely looked at him while he filmed a fraction of my hunt. His opinionated narrative of this encounter shows his willingness to spread misinformation to pass this bill.

The morning of February 10th began as an average day of hunting for myself. I happened to have a friend with me this day. We both rode in my vehicle to a farm where the owner encourages hunting coyotes with the aid of dogs. This farmland borders a large parcel of state land. There is roughly 950 acres between state and private land in this area that the owners have encouraged hunting coyotes on. When we arrived at the dairy farm, I unloaded two of the three dogs I had with me and walked them down an old road on the property in search of a coyote track. About 300 yards below the farm, we found a track and both dogs began to trail it. Scent conditions on this day were far from optimal and after attempting to follow the scent for about 200 yards my younger dog turned around and followed his back track to me. Meanwhile my ten-year-old dog continued to follow the faint scent trail.

I decided to load the dog back in the truck and drive to the other side of this block of the woods. I parked at the state land access point and walked in about 100 yards and my dog was still trailing this track so told my friend to let my other two dogs out of the truck. These dogs made their way towards me and as they ran across the coyote scent both began to follow their nose. To someone who does not understand hunting with dogs this may seem mundane but to watch my young dog find the scent of the game I have trained him to pursue made me ecstatic. Personally, I think this part of the hunt far exceeds harvesting a coyote.

I made my way back to my truck excited to tell my friend how proud I was of this young dog's progress. As I began to tell him he interrupted me and said “who's that” as he pointed at a truck parked with two people standing by it just up the road.

As I looked closer, I could see one was aiming a video camera at us. Immediately my feelings of joy and excitement were replaced by anxiety and fear for I knew this was Rod Coronado of Vermont Wildlife Patrol.

I have seen his YouTube videos where he antagonizes hunters in hopes of creating a confrontation. At this point my dogs were still trailing the coyote scent parallel with the road towards where Rod was parked so I was forced to drive around to once again be ahead of

my dogs. As I drove by, he had his camera at his side, and I gave him a wave and he gave me a quick one back but just as I passed him, I looked in my mirror and saw him snap his camera up watching as I drove away.

I parked my truck where the coyote crossed the road and two of my dogs were together and continued following the scent trail while the younger dog followed at his own pace. I decided to walk down into the woods to meet this puppy and praise him for what he had done. I led the dog back to my truck on a leash and as I entered the road, I could see the two individuals were still standing by their truck with a camera being pointed in my direction. I opened my tailgate and the puppy jumped into the dog box.

As I began traveling in the direction of the two dogs that I had previously allowed to continue trailing the coyote across the road there was a brief conversation between my friend and I whether to proceed with the hunt or not. I have seen Rod Coronado's content on YouTube, and I knew that any footage he filmed of my hunt would ultimately end up online with his own narrative written into it. Therefore, I decided to prematurely end my hunt. We drove about 300 yards up the road where I walked about 100 yards down in the woods and waited on the coyote track for my dogs to follow it to me. When they arrived, I spent a minute petting them and telling them they did a good job then leashed them and walked them to the truck where we loaded up and went home.

On my way home I contacted my local game warden and explained my hunt in detail from beginning to end. I knew that this would end up as an exaggerated story on YouTube and I wanted to make sure I let someone know how my hunt went before this happened.

Contrary to his video on YouTube and his testimony to the House Committee on Environment and Energy, I did not use this “bait pile” that he took upon himself to investigate to pursue this coyote. As a matter of fact, it is 1.2 miles from where I initially released my dog on this coyote track to the “bait pile” that Rod insinuates I used. Also, if Rod Coronado were willing to do some minimal investigation, he could have asked the owner of the land that this “bait pile” was on. He would have been informed that this is where he has dumped beef scraps for years from cows that he has raised for food. But this would be counterintuitive to his narrative against hunting coyotes with the aid of dogs. He also mentions that there were multiple hound trucks. There was only my truck with my friend who was riding with me. I guess one truck with only two hunters in it doesn't make for a very colorful story. The last misleading language he used to describe his footage of my hunt was that my dogs had to be “physically captured.” I simply lead one dog out of the woods on a leash in front of him.

I hope this letter invokes some awareness of the lengths anti-hunting organizations are willing to go to advance their agenda. Individuals and organizations that willfully spread misinformation deserve much scrutiny, but our legislature seems to be taking their word as gospel. The traction Bill S. 258 has gained is absolute proof of this. As a lifelong resident of this great state, I urge all of the Vermont legislature to oppose Bill S. 258.

Sincerely,

Christopher Burke