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## "USE THE SCHOOLS"

How Federal Tax Dollars Are Spent to Market Guns to Kids

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The Violence Policy Center is a national educational foundation that conducts research on violence in America and works to develop violence-reduction policies and proposals. The Center works to examine the role of firearms in America, conduct research on firearms violence, and explore new ways to decrease it. The Violence Policy Center is a national tax-exempt educational foundation granted 501(c)(3) status by the Internal Revenue Service.

Past studies released by the Center include: December 1994's *Female Persuasion: A Study of How the Firearms Industry Markets to Women and the Reality of Women and Guns*; November 1994's *Firearms Production in America*; July 1994's *Deadly Odds: An Analysis of Handgun Justifiable Homicides Committed by Women in 1992*; February 1994's *Cease Fire: A Comprehensive Strategy to Reduce Firearms Violence*; and, December 1992's *More Gun Dealers Than Gas Stations: A Study of Federally Licensed Firearms Dealers in America*.

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## **"Schools Are an Opportunity. Grasp it."**

In the wake of slumping handgun sales among the primary market of white males, the firearms industry has targeted the youth of America. In the forefront of this campaign has been the industry's leading trade association, the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF). The NSSF is perhaps best known as the founder and sponsor of the annual SHOT (Shooting, Hunting, Outdoor Trade) show, the annual trade show for the firearms industry.<sup>1</sup>

The National Shooting Sports Foundation was founded in 1961 "to promote a better understanding of and a more active participation in the shooting sports." Located in Newtown, Connecticut, the NSSF promises its more than 1,100 members—composed primarily of firearm manufacturers (including assault weapon and Saturday Night Special producers), ammunition manufacturers, firearm dealers and distributors, and manufacturers of firearm-related products—that it "is at work for you. Introducing new customers to your products, re-introducing old ones...." Under the heading "Youth Education Programs," the organization's standard information pamphlet promises:

Over the next five years, the number of children reaching age 13 each year (hunting age) will increase significantly, with 3,600,000 new buyers entering the market in 1994. Capturing their interest is vital to the continued health of the shooting sports industry and the NSSF has been working hard at it, placing pro-shooting messages in youth magazines, educational programs in schools and promotional material in stores, clubs and classrooms across the country....Many of these young boys and girls will grow up to be your customers—and those who don't will at least be more favorably inclined to hear pro-hunting and shooting messages.

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<sup>1</sup> Held on a rotating basis in the cities of Houston, Dallas, New Orleans, and Las Vegas, the SHOT show is open to industry members only and spotlights new firearm and outdoor products. The 1994 show, held in Dallas, Texas occupied 377,000 square feet of exhibition space and attracted more than 27,000 attendees. The 1995 show will be held in Las Vegas, Nevada January 19 to 22.

In 1992 the organization's *NSSF Reports* announced a "New Focus on Women & Youngsters" and promised, "Bringing women and youngsters to the shooting sports is the goal of fully half of the NSSF's new 1992 programs...." (The previous year the headline of an article in *NSSF Reports* detailing advertising inserts placed in youth-oriented magazines proclaimed "Scouting & 4-H Magazines Bring Shooting Message to 5,000,000 Potential Customers."<sup>2</sup>) As outlined in the aforementioned pamphlet and other NSSF publications, key to the organization's youth strategy has been using public and private schools to introduce youth to firearms via NSSF educational materials for grades four through 12 focusing on hunting and "wildlife management." The NSSF reasons that an increased acceptance—or lack of antagonism—toward hunting can lead to an interest in, and subsequent purchase of, firearms. This offers the industry political as well as financial benefits. Historically, gun owners are less likely than non-gun owners to endorse increased controls over firearms. In the "Community Relations" column of the September/October 1993 issue of the NSSF's magazine *S.H.O.T. Business*,<sup>3</sup> columnist and firearms celebrity Grits Gresham focused on suggestions for helping schoolchildren develop an interest in firearms. Wrote Gresham:

There's a way to help ensure that new faces and pocketbooks will continue to patronize your business: Use the schools. This is where most of your potential, down-the-line shooters and hunters now are. Kids can't buy guns, you say? Well, yes and no. It's true that most students from kindergarten through high school can't purchase firearms on their own. But it's also true that in many parts of the country, youngsters (from preteens on up) are shooting and hunting. Pop picks up the tab. Whether they continue to shoot and hunt depends, to a great degree, on whether or not the desire is there. That's where you come in. Every decade there is a whole new crop of shining young faces taking their place in society as adults. They will quickly become the movers and shakers. Many of them can vote before leaving high school, whether they do or not. You can help see that they do. Will it be for or against a local ordinance proposal to ban those bad semi-autos, the Model 1100? Will they vote for or against even allowing a 'gun store' in town. Are you in for the

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<sup>2</sup> The article noted that since the early 1980s the NSSF has sponsored magazine inserts with a "positive message on the shooting sports" in Boy Scout publications. In 1991 inserts in both Boy Scout and 4-H publications reached an estimated five million youngsters. It added, "With more than one-third of all boys between the ages of 7 and 17 reading *Boys Life* or *Scouting* magazines, the importance of these special editorial sections cannot be overemphasized."

<sup>3</sup> *S.H.O.T. Business*, the NSSF's industry publication, was founded in 1993. The bi-monthly magazine's stated goal is to "fill each issue with practical information about topics such as merchandising, promotion, inventory control, staff management, sales staff training, financial and insurance matters, equipment, customer service and community relations...."

long haul? If so, it's time to make your pitch for young minds, as well as for the adult ones. Unless you and I, and all who want a good climate for shooting and hunting, imprint our positions in the minds of those future leaders, we're in trouble. We must serve as a counterpoint to the ceaseless flood of anti-gun and anti-hunting disinformation to which children—and their teachers—are now exposed. Schools should not be a problem as far as your business is concerned. In fact, they can be a huge asset. Think about it. Schools collect, at one point, a large number of minds and bodies that are important to your future well-being. How else would you get these potential customers and future leaders together, to receive your message about guns and hunting, without the help of the schools. How much effort and expense would be involved? Schools are an opportunity. Grasp it.

These thoughts were echoed later that year when *S.H.O.T. Business* editor Mike Schwanz promised readers, "An important mission of this magazine is to show our readers how they can expand their customer base, especially to women and children."

Documents obtained by the Violence Policy Center under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) reveal that federal tax dollars are now being used to help underwrite the NSSF's school-based marketing programs to children and young adults. In 1993 the NSSF received a grant totaling more than \$229,000 from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Department of the Interior for its "Wildlife Management Education in Schools" program. The money was awarded to NSSF (in conjunction with the Wildlife Management Institute) to update and expand materials for its school programs. A second \$101,000 grant was awarded to the organization that year for a series of video news releases, taped radio news releases, and a print ad campaign aimed at the general public outlining the success of wildlife management.<sup>4</sup>

The grants, which were approved under the Bush Administration, were

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<sup>4</sup> The materials comprising "A Wildlife Management Success Story" were made available at no cost to news editors in the hope that they would include them in their local and national news programs. The NSSF proposal submitted to the government predicted that the ads would reach 20 million people.

financed through the Pittman-Robertson Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act.<sup>5</sup> A portion of Pittman-Robertson funds are available for administration, and NSSF's grants were written to qualify for those funds.

Designed to "improve the understanding and acceptance of hunting among school-aged youngsters," the grant provided "for the update of three NSSF-produced educational programs and the coordinated free distribution of these programs to selected elementary, junior and senior high schools."

According to the NSSF proposal, the original videos were developed in 1979 in response to a study by Opinion Research Corporation which showed that only 37 percent of teenage boys and seven percent of teenage girls supported hunting. The NSSF then began an educational program centered on the free distribution of professionally produced videos. By 1985, the NSSF had 45,000 programs in schools and a repeat of the Opinion Research Study indicated that teenage support for hunting had increased by nearly 40 percent. Since 1980, the NSSF has placed more than 92,000 of its programs in America's schools.

In its proposal, the NSSF offered as the most recent justification for increased programming a 1990 poll conducted for it by the Gallup Organization which found that "a significant increase in support for hunting occurred when students were provided with even the slightest amount of positive information on hunting." The NSSF proposal noted that the videos would not only increase *participation* in hunting (with presumed increases in firearm sales) but also appeal to both young boys and girls (dovetailing with industry niche marketing tactics):

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<sup>5</sup> According to the July 1994 issue of *Shooting Industry* magazine, since 1937 the Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration program has been funded by an 11 percent manufacturers' excise tax on rifles, shotguns, and ammunition. A 10 percent tax on handguns and archery equipment was added in 1970. The federal money is apportioned to the states under the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act, which funds wildlife management, conservation, and hunter education programs. Each state's share is determined by a formula based on land area and the number of hunting licenses sold. Since 1939, the manufacturer's excise tax has raised more than \$2.6 billion for these programs.

Based on previously cited surveys, we project that support for hunting will increase by approximately 50% in classrooms viewing the program. At the same time, student awareness of the success of wildlife management will increase, heightening support for the programs and policies of the state fish and wildlife agencies. Participation in hunting will be positively affected as peer pressure in opposition to hunting will be reduced....Use of female moderators and comments by female hunters as appropriate will add to the overall impression that hunting is an acceptable activity for both men and women.

According to the proposal, the update and distribution was conducted in cooperation with the Council for Wildlife Conservation and Education, a non-profit organization formed by the NSSF in cooperation with the Wildlife Management Institute and International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies. Video programs and take-home materials (for parents) that were updated and expanded under the grant include:

- o *The Un-endangered Species—The Success of Wildlife Management in North America.* Designed for junior and senior high school students, the proposal noted that after viewing the video "*the number of youngsters that approved of regulated hunting had more than doubled.*" [Italics not added].

- o *What They Say About Hunting.* Targeted at the same age group, the video "examined the acceptability of hunting in our modern society." The proposal noted that after viewing the program, the percentage of students that agreed with the statement that "hunting is not against the law but should be" dropped from 48 percent to 21 percent.

- o *Wildlife for Tomorrow—the Story of our Un-endangered Species.* The elementary school version of *The Un-endangered Species* with "[s]ignificant changes...made in the program to make it more interesting and understandable for younger students." The proposal noted, "Not only did the students indicate that they enjoyed the presentation, test results indicate they 'got the message.'"

Plans called for the three NSSF-produced educational programs to be offered free to public and private schools with enrollments of at least 300 students:

Following the strategy it employed previously, the Foundation will make the initial offering to the largest schools in the nation. This strategy not only reaches the most students per dollar but *also reaches those students in large cities and suburban areas where the approval of hunting is the lowest.* [italics added]

Left unstated in the proposal is that large cities and suburban areas are also the areas where support for gun control is the strongest. Or as columnist J. Wayne Fears states in a reprint of a 1990 *Shooting Times* article that the NSSF includes with its standard information packet, the NSSF's "education efforts in schools are probably the most noteworthy because today's youngsters are tomorrow's customers—and voters." The proposal estimated that the videos would reach more than 26 million students nationwide.

### **The NSSF and the Firearms Industry**

Federal funding of NSSF activities is only the latest twist in the organization's history of marketing to children and youth. An NSSF brochure for parents and guardians entitled, *When your youngster wants a gun...* answers the question, "How old is old enough?":

Age is not the major yardstick. Some youngsters are ready to start at 10, others at 14. The only real measures are those of maturity and individual responsibility. Does your youngster follow directions well? Is he conscientious and reliable? Would you leave him alone in the house for two or three hours? Would you send him to the grocery store with a list and a \$20 bill? If the answer to these questions or similar ones are 'yes,' then the answer can also be 'yes' when your child asks for his first gun.

In its role as the promotional arm of the firearms industry, the NSSF's board of governors consists of representatives of firearms and ammunition manufacturers as well as hunting publications and conservation organizations. Many of the companies that sit on the NSSF governing board as well as general members target youth in their advertising, either directly or through their parents.

Current and former members of the NSSF board of governors that actively market their products to youth include:

**Colt's Manufacturing Company, Inc.** Former NSSF board of governors member Colt of Hartford, Connecticut offers an ad with the headline "The Future of Firearms." In it, a proud father—arm draped around his college-age daughter's shoulder—shows her how to target shoot with Colt's .22 Woodsman pistol. The handgun ad is notable for the unusual inclusion of a father and *daughter* bonding via sports shooting—linking the pitch to both women and youth. The ad copy reads: "What gives the new Colt .22 caliber pistol such proud bloodlines?...Colt's designers have engineered a shooter's gun for all ages and sizes in this rugged stainless steel, single action pistol. And Tom Moran, fifteen-year Colt veteran, is making sure Colt's quality craftsmanship stays in the family for his daughter, Christine."

**Remington Arms Company, Inc.** NSSF board of governors member Remington has recognized the appeal assault weapons have on youth exposed to a steady diet of such guns on television and movie screens. In 1993 the New Haven, Connecticut company began marketing the Viper, a 22 caliber semi-automatic rifle with a detachable 10-round magazine. Although the gun would not qualify as an "assault rifle" under federal law, specific characteristics—the name, detachable ammunition magazine, and black plastic stock—are a clear effort by Remington to parlay the appeal of assault weapons into increased sales. Initial sales figures for the rifle have greatly exceeded Remington's expectations.

**Smith & Wesson Corporation** NSSF board of governors member Smith & Wesson of Springfield, Massachusetts offers its target pistols with the pitch: "Seems like only yesterday that your father brought you here for the first time. Those sure were the good times—just you, Dad, and his Smith & Wesson."

General members of the NSSF that also target youth include Feather Industries and Taurus:

**Feather Industries** NSSF member Feather Industries of Boulder, Colorado offers in its 1991 catalog an assault rifle available in both 9mm and 22 caliber with collapsible stock and high-capacity detachable ammunition magazine. The catalog cover features a father handing the gun to his baseball-capped son. Father and son are also featured in a magazine ad

where readers are urged to "Join in the Feather Family." While the son cradles the gun, the advertising copy promises that the rifle is "quickly becoming the choice of the next generation!"

Taurus NSSF member Taurus' ads promise "A Terrific Taurus Afternoon!" for the family with its M94 .22 revolver. The ad features a father helping his son shoot the handgun; nearby are the boy's mom and a golden retriever, all sharing "an all-too-rare moment...together." Miami, Florida-based Taurus promises that the M94 "provides a great way to introduce and teach a youngster the correct and responsible use of a sporting firearm." And because the handgun uses .22 ammo, "an entire afternoon of shooting fun will cost less than a trip to the local movie house."

### **"That's Their World"**

At issue is not hunting, but whether *any* industry should, with federal funds, use our schools to increase the sale of its product and bolster its political base. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service acknowledges that the program benefits the gun industry but sees no need to review the grant guidelines. Says USFWS spokesperson Craig Rieben, "They've got a product.... They're looking for a market. That's their world." Adding that "it's not our world," USFWS officials argue, however, that they are guided solely by the grant guidelines and that award decisions are made exclusively on the information contained in the grant proposal. And as to the striking disparity between the motivation behind the NSSF program and the Clinton Administration's strong stance on reducing firearms violence, Rieben and other USFWS officials convey indifference, arguing that they are not influenced by Administration policy.

The Violence Policy Center recommends that:

- o The Department of the Interior immediately review the United States Fish & Wildlife Service Pittman-Robertson grant guidelines and develop criteria to ensure that no funds are used for any industry's marketing or political purposes.
- o The USFWS review all grants currently pending or recently awarded to the National Shooting Sports Foundation or related organizations to see whether they are designed as marketing tools.
- o Consideration be given to diverting a significant portion of Pittman-Robertson funds to defray health care costs generated by firearms violence.