

Rep. Tangretti Remarks to

Sportsmen Group, 3/8/92

(Usual Greetings and Acknowledgements)

I want to thank you for your very kind and generous invitation and the opportunity to deliver a few remarks that I hope will be of interest.

I want to say at the outset that my current experience in outdoor sports is limited pretty much to the golf course and an occasional softball game at a church or club picnic.

And while I'm not an active participant, I strongly support the interests of outdoor sportsmen and women.

I'm in complete accord with their desire to conduct their favorite activities free of unwarranted interference from government or from pressure groups who disagree with, or simply disapprove of, those activities.

That goes for those who would harass hunters in the field and those who would attempt to infringe on our Second Amendment rights to keep and bear arms.

I don't know of any groups that currently oppose fishing, but who knows. Some of these animal rights people are opposed to zoos, some are opposed to farming methods, some are against eating meat.

So, it's possible an organization could spring up any day now, calling itself "Friends of Fish," or something similar and want you to register your fishing rods with the sheriff's office..

We might smile at that thought. But we know there is a serious problem...in Pennsylvania and elsewhere...with hunter harassment.

In Pennsylvania, we have a law against interfering with hunters, and we're working to make it stronger.

After the current law was passed about six or seven years ago, it was found inadequate to ensure hunters' rights to be free of harassment.

Hunting opponents...the "anti's"... could interfere with hunting, walk along with hunters, make noise, frighten away game and claim they were innocently going about their own business.

A new bill introduced this session (H.B. 961) is intended to clarify the law's language and close the loopholes that allow harassers to evade the law.

The bill's sponsors tell me its language will encompass every known tactic used by anti-sportsmen interests and make certain they pay a penalty for their arrogant interference in lawful outdoor sports.

And the bill will extend the law's current protection for hunters and trappers to individuals involved in other activities permitted under the Game Code such as dog training and field trials involving released birds.

The bill is now before the House Game and Fisheries Committee and is likely to be reported soon for a vote on the House floor.

So far this session, the General Assembly has passed...and the governor has signed...legislation on senior hunting licenses and boat registration fees.

The hunting license change will enable senior citizens to qualify for lower cost senior hunting licenses during the calendar year when they turn 65 instead of waiting until they pass their 65th birthday.

A bill that will do the same thing for senior fishing licenses has passed the House and is still in the Senate where a vote is expected within the next month or so.

Registration fees for motorboats were raised this year for the first time since 1963, and the same bill changed the name of the Fish Commission to the Fish and Boat Commission. The motorboat registration fees will now range from \$10 to \$20, depending on the size of the boat.

Hunter safety is a big topic this session, and there's a bill in the House to strengthen the penalties for shooting another hunter...or someone else...in mistake of game.

For instance, it's a summary offense now when someone is shot at but not injured. That would become a misdemeanor offense.

A shooting that results in injury or death would be elevated to higher degrees of misdemeanor, and a negligent killing would be subject to jail sentence for the first time -- as long as six months imprisonment.

I know we're all concerned with safety. It's a very great tragedy to all those involved whenever a hunter is shot.

And its always something the media plays up in a way that arouses the public's attention and fuels the movement for more restrictions on hunting.

Never mind that a million hunters were out on opening day of deer season. Instead the headlines proclaim, "Opening Day Fatal to Deer Hunters."

You have to read well into the story before you find out all but one or two were heart attacks.

Still, there's every good reason to make hunting as safe as we can possibly make it so it will be around for your children and your grandchildren to enjoy.

I'm sure that's why the new safety regulations were recently adopted for turkey hunting -- because of the 53 shooting injuries and 2 fatalities that occurred last year.

Beginning next fall, turkey hunters will be required to wear 250 square inches of blaze orange on their head, back and chest combined. The Game Commission tells me the requirement can be met by wearing a blaze orange hat and vest.

And starting in the spring of 1993 -- for spring gobbler seasons -- hunters will be required to have 100 square inches (equivalent to a cap or a sash) while they are moving.

There's no requirement in the spring season for wearing blaze orange while the hunter is in a stationary hunting position.

Although some turkey hunters and turkey hunting organizations have opposed these requirements, they are --- as I said -- intended to protect hunters. And equally important, they will protect the sport from harmful publicity.

We all want to keep alive the outdoor sports tradition, whether it is hunting, fishing, trapping or target shooting.

There are few activities that can match outdoor sports for bringing family members together and fostering respect between the generations.

It's a great way to introduce young people to adult responsibilities and instill in them a love for their natural environment.

And the revenues generated from the sale of hunting and fishing equipment support preservation efforts that benefit all of our people -- even those who are most radically opposed to the sportsmen's interests.

I know you all work hard to get that message out to the general public and set the record straight about the contributions your organizations make to our environment.

I know from my experience, whenever there's an issue in the legislature to protect our land, water and outdoor recreation resources, sportsmen are always involved and usually provide the leadership.

So I hope I can help you get your story out, set the record straight, and be the force you deserve to be in protecting your legitimate rights and interests.

Sportsmen have earned that position of environmental leadership, not with empty rhetoric but with their real and continuing contributions of time, money and effort.

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