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Kennedy-Washington Reaction 250

WASHINGTON AP - President Johnson and other Washington leaders shared shock today at the news of another shooting, another Kennedy fallen, and many of them wondered about their country.

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He had been awakened to hear the news in the early morning from his White House staff.

"All America prays for his country," the President said.

"We also pray that divisiveness and violence be driven from the hearts of men everywhere," he said.

Johnson was one of two Washington figures commenting on the shooting who were in Dallas five years ago when President John F. Kennedy was assassinated.

Sen. Ralph Yarborough, D-Tex., who rode with Johnson in the Dallas motorcade, said the land is permeated with violence.

And Atty. Gen. Ramsey Clark, who ordered an FBI probe of the shooting, said: "It's just a great tragedy and it has to be a matter of deep concern to all of our people that these acts continue."

"It is an unspeakable tragedy that America is so permeated with violence that they will attempt to remove those who serve in this wholly patriotic manner," Yarborough said.

"There is no family in our generation that's done more for America than the Kennedys," the Texan added.

"It seems to me," said Sen. Thomas J. Dodd, D-Conn., "that our society is going crazy."

Dodd was the chief fighter for a bill that would ban interstate gun sales but lost half the battle when the Senate voted earlier this spring to ban mail-order sales only of hand guns, not rifles and shotguns. This bill is in the House.

"When are the American people going to take up and do something about guns?" Dodd wondered amid his shock in the early morning hours.

House Speaker John W. McCormack could only moan with grief when first told of the news.

Senate Democratic Leader Mike Mansfield expressed "fear for my country's future if we do not regain our stability."

"The terror and horror numbs and I'm just praying for Bob's recovery," Mansfield said.

Senate Republican Leader Everett M. Dirksen called the shooting "a disaster of national importance." He added it "all the more strengthens the need for strict law enforcement."

Sen. Joseph D. Tydings, D-Md., who has campaigned for Kennedy, said he was shocked and stunned by this horrible violence, this attempt on Sen. Kennedy's life.

House Republican Whip Leslie C. Arends of Illinois, said, "This is a crazy world." His voice trailed off.

The House was scheduled to vote today on an attempt to send differing versions of a crime control bill to a House-Senate conference committee. Arends said he hopes this is defeated and other action taken quickly to accept the broader Senate bill which would ban the mail-order sale of handguns.

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