

Johnson Blasts Weak Gun Bill

United Press

Washington

President Johnson, even as the House completed Congressional action on the omnibus crime control bill, demanded yesterday that Congress strengthen the bill's gun control provision.

"Criminal violence from the muzzle of a gun has once again brought heartbreak to America," the President said in reference to the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy.

"In this new hour of tragedy let us now spell out our grief in constructive action."

In a letter to Congressional leaders, which he later read to the nation over television, the President was contemptuous of the gun control provision of the crime bill.

The House overwhelmingly passed the measure yesterday and sent it to the President for his signature. The vote was 368 to 17.

The bill would outlaw interstate mail order sales of handguns and prohibit over-the-counter sale of handguns to minors and non-residents of the dealer's state.

Mr. Johnson called this "a watered down version of the gun control law I recommended."

As he has repeatedly before, the Chief Executive again appealed to Congress to extend the bill's restrictions on handgun sales to include rifles and shotguns as well.

"I call upon the Congress

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in the name of sanity, in the name of safety — and in the name of an aroused citizenship — to give America and American citizens the gun control law it needs," the President said.

DEATHS

The President told Congress that "weapons of destruction can be purchased by mail as easily as baskets of fruits or cartons of cigarettes."

In this century, he said, more Americans have died by firearms — 750,000 — than in all the wars the nation has fought.

"Each year in this country," he said, "guns are involved in more than 6500 murders. This compares with 30 in England, 99 in Canada, 68 in West Germany and 37 in Japan."

Of the two million guns sold in the United States last year, he argued, "far too many were bought by the demented, the deranged, the hardened criminal and the convict, the addict and the alcoholic."

CONCLUSION

He concluded:

"We cannot expect these irresponsible people to be prudent in their protection of us, but we can expect the Congress to protect us from them."

In addition to the gun-control section, the bill would:

- Establish a two-year, \$400-million program of Federal grants to improve training and equipment of state and local police forces.

- Make the sole test of the admissibility of confessions whether they were given voluntarily — with this point to

be decided by the trial judge.

(This would undo Supreme Court rulings that confessions are tainted if not obtained with strict regard to the prisoner's right to counsel and other safeguards for defendants.)

- Authorize Federal wiretapping and electronic eavesdropping by officers acting under court order. State and local officers would have the same privileges in states which pass implementing legislation.

SECURITY

This runs counter to present Federal practice restricting such surveillance to cases involving the national security.

All these latter provisions were added by the Senate to a "safe-streets" bill passed by the House last year and limited to the police-training program.

Despite reservations, Mr. Johnson would find it difficult to veto the bill in a political election year marked by peaking violence capped with the assassinations of Senator Robert F. Kennedy and of the Rev. Martin Luther King.

Chairman Emanuel Celler of the House Judiciary Committee said he would introduce legislation next week to extend the handgun controls to rifles and shotguns and to delete provisions liberalizing use of confessions, "which threaten the constitutional rights of our citizens."

TIDE

The tide for the bill was demonstrated by the sweeping vote of House members who said the nation demanded that Congress "do something about crime and violence now."

The Senate pieced the bill together in weeks of debate before passing it 72 to 4 and just hours after Kennedy was shot the House rejected 317 to 60 a move to send it to a joint conference for modifications.

The only Federal gun control laws now on the books were enacted in 1934 and 1938 to limit traffic in gangster weapons such as sawed-off shotguns and machine guns and prohibit interstate shipments.

CRISIS

Many said Kennedy's death underscored the need for action against a national crisis of crime and violence.

Kennedy in fact was on record as being dissatisfied with portions of the bill.

He favored aid to police, but wanted it to go directly to local forces rather than through state governments. He wanted stronger gun controls covering rifles and shotguns, opposed provisions aimed at the Supreme Court and felt the provisions allowing wiretapping were too broad.

Off campaigning much of the time, Kennedy did not vote on final Senate passage.