

Pressure Building in Congress For and Against Gun Controls

By DAVID R. JONES
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 16— Senator Warren G. Magnuson, chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee, took the Senate floor the other day to discuss his decision to support stricter gun controls.

"Last night I had a call from a good friend, the editor of a Washington state sportsman's publication, a publication which has long fought against gun control legislation," the Washington Democrat related.

The editor inquired about the Senator's change of heart on gun controls, Mr. Magnuson said, and then said, "We are going to have to oppose your election in November."

Mr. Magnuson's political problem soon may be shared by other Congressmen caught in the controversy over tougher firearms controls set off by the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy.

Positions Abandoned

Spurred by the heaviest constituent mail in several years, a number of Senators have abandoned their previous opposition to gun controls. But as Mr. Magnuson has learned, the pressures are starting to build from those who vigorously oppose tougher legislation.

The protests are coming from the so-called "gun lobby," an amalgam of corporations, publications, organizations, sportsmen, farmers and gun lovers who want to keep the nation's firearms, especially rifles and shotguns, free of restrictive regulation.

The keystone in the lobby is the National Rifle Association, a tax-exempt organization that promotes shooting from its \$3.5-million headquarters here, but is not registered as a lobby but rather as a "social welfare organization." Its president, Harold W. Classen, has denied that the group does any lobbying.

Another element is the Sporting Arms and Ammunition Manufacturers Institute, an organization of 10 major firearms makers, some of whom employ registered lobbyists here.

But the forces that long have fought tighter gun controls go far beyond that. The National Grange and the American Farm Bureau Federation, for instance, have spoken up for gun-bearing farmers. The American Legion has thrown in its support in the past, as have the Outdoor Writers Association of America and the National Retail Hardware Association.



Harold W. Classen, head of National Rifle Association.

Another leading member of the lobby is the National Shooting Sports Foundation in Riverside, Conn. Critics contend that the foundation was formed in 1961 to battle tougher gun controls. Charles Dickey, the director of the group denies it, though the organization has bought advertisements opposing strict regulations.

Members in Foundation

The foundation's 104 members include such diverse concerns as the Abercrombie & Fitch company, the New York sporting goods retailer; the Izaak Walton League of America, a leading conservation group; Field and Stream, an outdoor publication of Holt, Rinehart & Winston; the American Walnut Manufacturers Association, whose members produce wood used in rifles; the National Skeet Shooting Association and the National Sporting Goods Association.

There are signs, however, of divisions in the gun lobby. Some conservation groups are expressing doubts about their continued involvement. Five firearms makers are supporting tougher control over the mail order sales of long guns, though favoring a proviso that would enable them to put pressure on legislatures to exempt states from the law.

But the National Rifle Association shows no signs of altering its rigid stand against pending legislation and is gearing for a battle.

Mr. Classen indicates that there will be "informal" meetings with other groups that

oppose the legislation, and some visits with Congressmen on Capitol Hill.

But he says that the bulk of the group's activity will involve publicity aimed at energizing millions of hunters, sportsmen, farmers and others to fight the measures.

The association traditionally uses "legislative bulletins" to inform members about important state and local legislation, and 18 such bulletins were sent in 1967 on "crucial" matters. Last week, Mr. Classen sent a letter to 900,000 members urging them to rally against tougher legislation. A similar call in 1965 generated hundreds of thousands of letters and was instrumental in defeating legislation.

Operation Effective

Many Capitol Hill sources believe that the gun lobby is the most effective, dollar for dollar, in Washington. The main reason, they say, is not that the association is adept with Congress but that it is efficient in getting sportsmen, farmers and gun lovers to put pressure on their Congressmen.

Nobody knows for sure how much the gun lobby spends but the amount does not approach that of some big lobbies.

The National Rifle Association spends more than \$250,000 annually on legislative and public relations work. The National Shooting Sports Foundation is known to have spent

about \$200,000 for advertising and promotion in 1963. The firearms makers, in addition to Washington lobbying, are reported to be particularly active at the state level.

Critics contend that the rifle association uses distortions to frighten members into writing their Congressmen to oppose pending legislation. Much of the publicity is aimed, one senatorial source explains, at conservation-minded citizens who like to hunt and fish, "give gun safety lessons to kids, feed the pheasants in the winter, stock the ponds," but fear the loss of their right to use guns.

Money is the string that ties the leading members of the lobby together, the critics say.

The firearms industry dislikes any restrictions that will tend to reduce gun sales or the size of its market, says Eugene W. Gleason, a staff man on the Senate Juvenile Delinquency Subcommittee, which long has pushed for tough gun laws. He notes that the rifle association gets 25 per cent of its \$5.6-million annual income in advertising by gun makers, sporting goods suppliers and others in its monthly American Rifleman magazine.

Gun Industry Involved

The welfare of the nation's conservation effort also is closely linked to the success of the gun industry. Almost all the money available for wildlife law enforcement, research, management, land acquisition development and other programs comes from the sale of permits to the nation's 15 million hunters.

The 11 per cent Federal excise tax on sporting arms and ammunition, under a 1937 law, brings more than \$25-million a year into conservation work. State licenses, tags and permits bring in nearly \$80-million a year. The \$3 Federal migratory bird-hunting stamp finances the purchase and development of wetlands.

The Wildlife Management Institute and the National Wildlife Federation, leading conservation groups, long have opposed tougher gun controls. The institute is reported to be a recipient of contributions from the firearms industry.

William R. Barbee, assistant director of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, says that conservation officials dislike legislation that would create "complications" for long-gun owners because "a great deal of their conservation income" comes from hunting fees. The International Association of Game, Fish and Conservation Commissioners has opposed tougher controls.

The rifle association also has strong ties with the Department of Defense, which generally has supported association rifle programs. Franklin L. Orth, the association's executive vice president, is a former Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army. Many association officials have been ranking military figures.

Westerners Fight Curbs

The arguments against tougher gun controls have traditionally been received most favorably by Congressmen in Western states, where the economy depends heavily on sportsmen, and where hunters and farmers make up a strong political voice. While polls have shown that the vast majority of Americans long have favored tougher gun controls, most citizens have failed to push for them with the energy that the so-called rural "bullet vote" has fought against controls.

Mr. Classen counts among his staunchest allies Senator Roman L. Hruska, Republican of Nebraska; Representative Robert L. F. Sikes, Democrat of Florida, and Representative John D. Dingell, Democrat of Michigan. Mr. Sikes recently resigned from the association's board so he could work more freely for the association. Mr. Dingell recently was elected to the board.

McKinley Dirksen of Illinois, and the Senate Democratic leader, Mike Mansfield of Montana. Mr. Mansfield and Mr. Hart have just changed sides, however.

Strom Thurmond, Republican of South Carolina; Senator Bourke B. Hickenlooper, Republican of Iowa; Senator Philip A. Hart, Democrat of Michigan; the Senate Republican leader, Everett

Among others who have been friendly to the gun lobby are Representative Cecil R. King, Democrat of California; Representative Robert R. Casey, Democrat of Texas; Senator