

Shooting Down Gun Control

One year ago Congress approved the Gun Control Act to help make the country a little bit safer from violence and crime caused by the indiscriminate sales of rifles and shotguns and ammunition. It was a long shot away from being a truly effective gun-control law; it fell short of licensing owners and registering their firearms, but it was, as we observed at the time, "a law that can be built on."

Today Congress is playing games even with this half-way law. Far from being strengthened, the Gun Control Act is in danger of being peppered down. An exemption tacked on a completely unrelated bill by the Senate would allow ammunition for long guns to be sold over the counter with no names or questions asked. This backward step from existing law may be seconded by the House—unless a loud clamor is heard from the American public.

Under present law, when a person walks in off the street to buy a box of bullets or cartridges he must give his name, address, age and identify himself—usually by simply showing his driver's license. It is admittedly a nuisance and causes a little extra book-keeping; so do the Rx's carefully recorded by pharmacists dispensing drugs under law. Buying a gallon of gasoline or a pair of socks with a credit card takes even more time and record-keeping.

Yet sportsmen and gun dealers are so powerful in

the halls of Congress that they are trying to scrap this simple precaution for the sale of ammunition. Neither the Senate nor the House have held any hearings to change the Gun Control Act; instead they are using the devious route of a rider that avoids public debate and outcry.

The Administration unfortunately is doing nothing to stop this breach in the gun-control law. The irony of this position was underscored by former Attorney General Ramsey Clark over a year ago: "Those who stridently call for law and order, yet oppose or ignore gun control, fail to face the issues. Extremists of every bent cry out against gun control. They want an armed America."