

Johnson Retreats on Gun Curbs In Effort to Win Passage of Bill

By JOHN HERBERS

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 28— President Johnson has agreed to weaken his gun control bill so as to improve its chances of getting through Congress.

The proposed change would permit states to exempt themselves from the ban against the mail order sale of rifles and shotguns. The original Administration bill would ban the mail order sale of all firearms.

Senator Thomas J. Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut, author of the Administration bill, introduced the weakening amendment today and issued a statement calling for its support. A similar proposal has been submitted to a House Judiciary subcommittee that has been considering the bill.

Senator Dodd said the amendment was designed to overcome strong opposition to the bill from rural and Western states.

"Witnesses from these states have indicated that a mail order ban or stringent controls on mail order rifles and shotguns would effect a hardship on sportsmen, ranchers and farmers whose primary access to sporting rifles and shotguns is through the mail order routes," Mr. Dodd said.

"Eight of our Western states," he continued, "have memorialized Congress to oppose this gun bill mainly because of the inclusion of long arms."

"I believe this amendment will dissipate such opposition," Mr. Dodd said.

The amendment would permit a state legislature to enact a law relieving citizens of the state from the bill's outright prohibition on mail order acquisitions of rifles and shotguns. The ban would still apply to the sale of hand guns.

Move Called Necessary

Much of the opposition to gun control legislation has come from the National Rifle Association. Under the proposed amendment the association could be expected to shift its pressure on the state legislatures to obtain the exemption.

Several Congressional sources said the amendment was necessary if the President was to get any gun control legislation through Congress this year. Senator Dodd and others

pointed out that the bill still contained restrictions on over-the-counter sales and on the importation of firearms from other countries.

On Sept. 14 President Johnson, in an address to the International Association of Chiefs of Police, pleaded with the American people for help in limiting the sale of firearms.

One week later, the Senate Juvenile Delinquency Subcommittee, of which Mr. Dodd is chairman, approved the President's bill 5 to 4. The measure still faced trouble, however, in the full Judiciary Committee and on the Senate floor as well as in the House.

Congressional sources said the Justice Department and President Johnson had agreed to the Dodd amendment to overcome the opposition.

Disagreement Expressed

Some advocates of strong gun control legislation considered the amendment premature. They thought the tactic should have been saved for use during the floor fight.

Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, said he still favored the Administration bill as originally submitted. He said he believed a vast majority of the people did, too.

Senator Dodd, on the other hand, said the amendment would "not greatly reduce the over-all effectiveness" of the bill.

The amendment, he said, "would be applicable only in those states which feel that they do not need the help of the Federal Government in enforcing their own laws."