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Weakening Gun Control

The Gun Control Act, which became law after the murders of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy was an inadequate measure but acceptable as the first step toward reducing this nation's homicidal slaughter. But the Administration, Congress and the sportsmen's lobby have contrived to regress rather than move forward from that initial step.

Two years ago, Congress repealed the section of the law requiring sellers of ammunition to make a record of the name, age and residence of each purchaser of shotgun and rifle ammunition.

Now Representative Ullman, Democrat of Oregon, with Administration support, is pushing a bill to widen this exemption to include .22 caliber rimfire ammunition. This ammunition did not come within the earlier exemption because it is not used exclusively in rifles. That is precisely the difficulty. Although popular with hunters, .22 caliber rimfire is also used in cheap pistols, the favorite weapon of every petty criminal.

The House passed this bill last year by a vote of 246 to 59, but it died when the Senate did not act in the rush to adjourn. If passed this early, however, it will be hard to stop next year in the Senate where Western and Southern opponents of gun control are relatively more powerful than in the House.

Since the bill coming up under suspension of the rules requires a two-thirds vote, Congressmen have the power to block its approval. What is being offered as a bill to relieve country storekeepers of burdensome record-keeping would actually flash a green light for the killers with their "Saturday night specials."