

Rifle Group Mounts Drive Against Gun Controls

By JOHN W. FINNEY
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, June 14 —

The National Rifle Association sought today to counter the rising public pressure on Congress for stricter gun controls by suggesting that "the sportsmen of America" lay down a barrage of mail in opposition.

"The right of sportsmen in the United States to obtain, own and use firearms for proper lawful purposes is in the greatest jeopardy in the history of our country," Harold W. Glassen, the association president, said in a two-page letter to the association's nearly 900,000 adult members.

Senator Joseph D. Tydings, sponsor of legislation proposing the registration and licensing of all firearms, charged that the association "lobbyists once again are unleashing a campaign of calculated hysteria and distortion to defeat reasonable gun control legislation."

"The rights of sportsmen, hobbyists, hunters and all other law-abiding citizens would be in no way jeopardized by the legislation proposed by the Administration or the bills proposed in the Senate," the Maryland Democrat said in a statement. "These bills would merely deny firearms to juveniles

900,000 Members Are Urged to Counter Rising Public Pressure for Curbs

and criminals."

The Glassen letter made clear that the association, described in Congress as "The leader of the gun lobby," was opposed to all three major gun bills before Congress.

The Administration bill would ban the mail order sales of rifles and shotguns. A bill sponsored by Senator Thomas J. Dodd, Democrat of Connecticut, would require the registration of all firearms. The bill sponsored by Senator Tydings would also require the licensing of all gun owners, with licenses forbidden to former convicts, drug addicts and persons convicted of felonies.

A crime control bill that has been sent to the President includes a ban on the mail order sales only of handguns.

At a news conference Wednesday, Mr. Glassen said that the association did not "solicit" action by its members against legislation and that "we do not ask them ordinarily to contact Congress." He maintained that the association did not engage in lobbying.

However, his letter, all in capitals, said that "the situation demands immediate action by every law-abiding firearms owner in the United States."

The final paragraph said: "Unless the sportsmen of America clearly express their views without delay to their Senators and Congressmen, individuals will be prohibited from acquiring long guns in interstate commerce and general firearms registration will become a reality."

A postscript advised members that their "expressions of opinion should be brief, clear and courteous—never abusive or threatening."

The letter complained that there was an "intense effort" under way "to enact firearms controls both against the criminal and law-abiding citizen without differentiation."

The authors of all the gun control measures have emphasized that their objective was to keep guns out of the hands of criminal elements and not to prevent sportsmen from obtaining guns.

Mr. Glassen, however, revived an association argument that registration was but the first step toward eliminating

Continued on Page 18, Column 3

Continued From Page 1, Col. 4

the private ownership of firearms.

"Indications in the form of statements by some proponents of restrictive gun legislation are clear that their goal is complete abolition of civilian ownership of firearms," he said.

He did not identify the proponents.

If past practice is followed, the Glassen letter can be expected to provoke hundreds of thousands of letters to Congress, not only from association members but also from members of local sporting and conservation groups.

In 1965, for example, a "legislative memorandum" to association members was instrumental in blocking Congressional action on Administration gun control legislation similar to the one now before Congress.

Changed Conditions

But this year, in the opinion of some Congressional observers, conditions may have so changed that the association

may not be able to mount an effective counterattack.

In contrast to past years, the advocates of gun controls have seized the initiative with an outpouring of letters to Congress unmatched in recent years.

Senator Harrison A. Williams Jr., Democrat of New Jersey, reported that since the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy June 5, he had received more mail on gun controls than any other matter in his nine years in the Senate.

In the last five days, Senator Tydings has received nearly 5,000 letters, almost all of them advocating stricter controls. He has received 2,800 letters on Vietnam in the last three years.

Partly because of this mail, opinion in Congress seems to be shifting.

One of the more important switches was by Senator Warren G. Magnuson, chairman of the Commerce Committee, which, has always blocked gun control legislation.

The Washington Democrat, typical of the Western liberal who has opposed the controls, told the Senate yesterday that he was prepared to accept a

ban on the mail order sales of rifles and shotguns as well as the registration and licensing of all firearms.

Senator Magnuson, who is seeking re-election, predicted political retribution by the gun lobby, but he said that his conscience was so troubled by "the violence and terror surging through the streets" that he could no longer oppose stricter gun controls.

"I know what tomorrow's mail will bring," he said, "I am ready for the angry and intemperate letters, many of them from old friends and colleagues — from many I have

hunted with, from men who have long thought of me, as I have, as one of them. But for me, this has become a matter of deep conscience.

"The inconvenience [of gun controls] will be so insignificant; the contribution to the law and order of our society, so great."

When the Administration proposal for a ban on mail order sales of rifles and shotguns was offered as part of the crime control bill, it was defeated by a 53-to-29 vote. In the last week, eight Senators

have switched their position by becoming co-sponsors of one of the stricter gun control bills now pending before the Senate.

In addition to Senator Magnuson, they are Senators Philip A. Hart of Michigan, Fred R. Harris of Oklahoma, A. S. Mike Monroney of Oklahoma, Edmund S. Muskie of Maine, Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin and William Proxmire of Wisconsin, Democrats, and Hugh Scott, Republican of Pennsylvania.

Other past opponents, such as Senator Mike Mansfield, Democrat of Montana, the majority leader, and George S. McGovern, Democrat of South Dakota, are reassessing their position.

Senator Tydings held a secret meeting with leading Washington lobbyists of labor, religious, the police, government and public affairs organizations to draft strategy on how to push the gun control legislation through Congress.

A Justice Department representative at the meeting reported that the Administration was considering going beyond its proposal for a ban on mail order sales of rifles and shotguns, and endorse proposals for registration and licensing.

The administration had rejected registration on the ground that it would be so controversial it might jeopardize action on gun control legislation.

Johnson Orders Study

AUSTIN, Tex., June 14 (UPI) —The White House said today that President Johnson had ordered a careful study of the anticrime bill by the Justice Department and other Federal agencies before deciding whether to sign or veto it.

A spokesman said that the President was not expected to take action on the bill this weekend. The deadline is Wednesday.

A.C.L.U. Backs Controls

The American Civil Liberties Union said yesterday that the freedom to bear arms must be sacrificed to the more important freedom of "free and fearless debate on which our free society rests."

The group announced that its national board of directors had taken the stand that strong Federal gun legislation was not only necessary but was, in fact, consistent with the right-to-bear-arms provision of the Constitution.

The position of the group was announced at a news conference by its executive director, John de J. Pemberton, and its general counsel, Edward J. Ennis.

The Second Amendment to the Constitution says: "A well-regulated militia being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people

to keep and bear arms shall not be infringed." Mr. Pemberton and Mr. Ennis said that the individual's right to keep and bear arms applied only to the preservation of a militia and not to the possession of guns by individuals.