

Text of Johnson's Gun Control Plea

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WASHINGTON, June 24—
Following is the text of
President Johnson's message
to Congress proposing tighter
gun controls:

Within the hour, in some
city in America, a gun shot
will ring out. And someone
will fall dead or wounded.

Unless we act purposefully
to prevent it, reckless and
wild gunfire will be heard
again—tomorrow, the day
after and all the days to fol-
low.

—As it was last Tuesday,
when a 71-year-old gas sta-
tion attendant was shot to
death in the course of a \$75
armed robbery;

—As it was last Wednes-
day, in Graceville, Fla., when
a mental patient shot a 3-
year-old boy through the
back of the head;

—As it was last Thursday,
in Chicago, when a young
man was killed and three
others injured by shotgun
blasts fired by a band of ro-
ving teen-agers.

These tragedies are im-
bedded in the grim statistics
of death and destruction at
gun point. The terrible toll is
rising.

The latest report of the
Federal Bureau of Investiga-
tion documents a shocking
increase in crimes where
deadly weapons are the in-
struments of violence.

Figures on Murders

In 1967, there were:

—7,700 murders with guns.

In 1966 there were 6,500.

—55,000 aggravated as-
saults with guns. In 1966
there were 43,000.

—Over 71,000 robberies
with guns. In 1966 there were
60,000.

It took this country nearly
two centuries to respond to
the danger of guns in crim-
inal and incompetent hands.
The first Federal action came
in the early 1930's, when the
Congress enacted safeguards
controlling the use of sawed-
off shotguns and submachine
guns to answer the public
indignation and fear arising
out of organized gang wars
in the cities.

But very little was done in
the next three decades, while
the velocity of speeding bul-
lets exacted their deadly toll
across America. Alone among
the modern nations of the
world, we remained without
the gun control laws that
other countries accept as an
elementary need and condi-
tion of life.

We can see the difference
in the last reported compar-
isons of homicides by gunfire.
Out of 15 countries report-
ing, the United States ranked
worst—with a rate of 2.7
gun murders per 100,000
population. Here are some



United Press International
President Johnson reads a
message he sent Congress.

of the statistics:

—2.7 for the United States

— .03 in the Netherlands and
.04 in Japan.

— 2.7 for the United States
— .05 in England and Wales.

— 2.7 for the United States
— .12 in West Germany and
.70 in Italy.

— 2.7 for the United States
— .52 in Canada and .26 in
Belgium.

Since I first became Presi-
dent, I have fought for strong
gun control laws.

Now—at long last—we
have begun to wove.

When I signed the Safe
Streets Act last week, Amer-
ica took the first major step
to control deadly firearms.
That measure outlawed the
interstate traffic in handguns
and prohibited the sale of
these small and lethal weap-
ons to minors.

We are now within sight
of the second major step—
the control of interstate traf-
fic in shotguns, rifles and
ammunition, as I requested
of the Congress on June 6. I
hope the Congress will move
with the greatest speed to
complete its action on this
proposal for protection.

But even before that step
is finally completed, we must
look to the next advance for
the safety of the American
people.

With the enactment of
these measures, we will have
constructed the nation's first
foundation upon which the
states can build and develop
their own gun control laws.
Without this bulwark of in-
terstate protection, even the
best state laws would be
exercised in futility.

To assure the protection

of our people, Federal laws
need two additional rein-
forcements:

¶A national registration of
all firearms, both those al-
ready in private hands and
those acquired in the future.

¶Federal licensing of all
possessors of firearms in
those states whose laws fail
to meet minimum Federal
standards.

Registration and licensing
have long been an accepted
part of daily life in America.

Automobiles, boats — even
dogs and bicycles in many
communities—are commonly
registered. Our citizens must
get licenses to fish, to hunt
and to drive. Certainly no
less should be required for
the possession of lethal
weapons that have caused so
much horror and heartbreak
in this country. Surely the
slight inconvenience for the
few is minimal, when meas-
ured against protection for
all.

Propose, first, the national
registration of every gun in
America.

There are now more fire-
arms than families in Amer-
ica. The estimates range be-
tween 50 and 100 million
guns in this country. Last
year more than 3 million
guns were added to private
stocks, building a massive
arsenal which arms the mur-
derer and the robber.

Registration will tell us
how many guns there are,
where they are and in whose
hands they are held.

Car registrations has been
the major factor in solving
hit-and-run auto deaths. The
new National Crime Informa-
tion Center, operated by the
Federal Bureau of Investiga-
tion, has already begun to
compile and computerize data
on stolen automobiles, stolen
guns, fugitives from justice
and other criminal activities.

Now, for the first time,
computer technology has
made the national registra-
tion of guns practical and
workable. The registration
of guns can be fed into a
computer bank at the Na-
tional Crime Information Cen-
ter. Through this system, the
owner of a gun anywhere in
the country can be identified
in a matter of seconds.

Licenses Urged

Second, I propose that
every individual in this coun-
try be required to obtain a
license before he is entrusted
with a gun.

Every murder by gunfire is
a criminal confrontation in
which—by design or through
a conspiracy of events—the
criminal faces his victim
through the telescope cross-
hairs of a rifle or over the
barrel of a pistol. An in-
flamed moment seizes the
criminal's mind, and his fin-

ger presses the trigger.

We may never be able to keep that criminal mind from erupting into violence, but we can stay the finger that squeezes the trigger — by keeping the gun out of the murderer's hand.

The surest route to accomplish this is to require every person who wants a gun to be licensed, first proving that he meets the qualifications.

The initiative for licensing should, of course, rest with the states, for there licensing can most effectively be carried out. Some states have already enacted comprehen-

sive licensing laws which prevent the vicious, the irresponsible and the insane from acquiring firearms.

In New Jersey, for example, which has had a licensing law for only a short period of time, over 1,500 disqualified persons have been denied access to lethal weapons. And states which have licensing requirements have lower homicide rates.

The states are now working on model gun control laws through a special committee of the National Association of Attorneys General, The National Council of State Governments and the National Governors Conference. I have urged that their work be expeditiously pursued.

To assure uniformity and adequate protection, the law I propose would establish minimum Federal licensing standards. These would prevent firearms from being sold to or possessed by criminals, dope addicts, alcoholics, the mentally ill and any others whose possession of guns would be harmful to the public health, safety or welfare.

A Plea to States

The Federal licensing law would go into effect only in those states without at least comparable standards, and only after the states have been given an opportunity to act first.

I call upon every Governor and state legislature to move as rapidly as they can to enact forceful laws for the protection of their people.

Nothing in these proposals will impair the legitimate ownership or use of guns in this country. In other countries which have sensible laws, the hunter and the sportsman thrive. These measures will entail no more inconvenience for the gun owners than dog tags or automobile license plates pose for any citizen.

Nor are they threats to the mystique of manhood or to the heritage of our people. Only the potential murderer's chance to kill and only the potential robber's chance to terrorize are threatened.

The only heritage that is

harmed is the record of violent death and destruction that shames our history.

The proposals in this message are no more and no less than commonsense safeguards which any civilized nation must apply for the safety of its people.

The American people have been too long without them. The cost of inaction through the decades affronts our conscience.

History Is Cited

Homes and city streets across the nation which might have rung with gunfire will be spared the tragedy of senseless slaughter. We will never be able to measure this violence that does not erupt. But our history tells us America will be a safer country if we move now—once and forever—to complete the protection so long denied our people.

I urge the Congress, as I have throughout all the days of my Presidency, to act immediately to control interstate sales of shotguns, rifles and ammunition.

Hearings on this legislation have long since been completed. The legislation has been reported favorably by the House Judiciary Committee and the Juvenile Delinquency Subcommittee of the Senate Judiciary Committee. That legislation—providing basic protection against interstate slaughter by firearms—should be brought to a vote without delay.

Once that foundation of interstate protection has been established, the registration and licensing proposals made in this message should be enacted. But these proposals afford no justification for delay in enacting strong and effective controls over interstate traffic of deadly weapons. Indeed, they build upon the foundation of interstate control which is so essential to their effectiveness.

Let us delay no longer in enacting that basic foundation of interstate protection and then let us go on to build—through registration and licensing—the kind of protection so long denied the American citizen.