

STRONG GUN CURBS PRESSED BY CLARK

Plea to Senate Urges Aims
Registration and Licensing

By JOHN W. FINNEY
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 10 — Attorney General Ramsey Clark told the Senate today that if it "really wants to do something to control crime," it should immediately pass a comprehensive gun control bill, including the registration and licensing of firearms.

In a three-page letter delivered this morning to the office of every Senator, the Attorney General called gun control legislation "the most important crime issue before the Senate."

"If we are serious in our professions of concern about crime, an especially violent crime, then let us more directly against the favored weapon of the lawless — guns," he said in a 23-page memorandum accompanying his letter.

The Senate plans to reopen debate late tomorrow on gun control legislation. Before it is a watered-down version of an Administration bill that would restrict the interstate sales of rifles and shotguns.

Law and Order Issue

In his letter, Mr. Clark sought to link gun controls with the law and order issue, a link that gun control advocates acknowledge that they have not been able to establish in the Congressional debate this year. Much of the opposition to stronger gun controls has come from the most vocal champions in Congress of law and order.

In terms sure to raise hackles in a Senate, where his political credit is slipping, Mr. Clark alluded to this conservative opposition by saying:

"Those who stridently call for law and order yet oppose or ignore gun control fail to face the issues, fail to protect the public and raise questions as to their own purposes."

"The real question before the Senate is not whether gun control legislation can reduce crime and save lives," he wrote. "We know it can."

"The question is whether our system of government will address itself to the issues that must be faced if we are to survive as a free and great people."

Mr. Clark endorsed the bill before the Senate, curbing the mail order sales of long guns, as "an essential first step toward effective gun control." But he urged the Senate to go further by passing legislation requiring the registration of all firearms and licensing of all gun owners.

Licensing and registration, he said, "are rudimentary steps essential to protect the public safety by keeping guns out of the hands of criminals, juveniles and the insane."

Describing registration and licensing as crime control measures, he said that licensing would help prevent criminals from obtaining and using firearms, and registration would provide "invaluable assistance to police in their effort to investigate and prevent gun crime."

Opposition Noted

Referring to the considerable opposition in Congress to any form of registration of licensing controls, the Attorney General said:

"Those who quibble about the inconvenience of registration and licensing, knowing lives are at stake, cannot be much concerned about life or crime either."

The battle in the Senate, however, is expected to be not so much over licensing and registration as over closing loopholes that both the House and the Senate Judiciary Committee have made in the Administration bill controlling interstate commerce in firearms.

An effort by Senator Joseph D. Tydings, Democrat of Maryland, to attach registration and licensing provisions to the bill is expected to fail.

Much of the political and public pressure for stronger gun controls, so pronounced after the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy, has subsided, and probably the most that gun control advocates can hope for is some form of licensing requirements for hand guns.

Basically, the Administration bill was designed to prevent the interstate mail order sales of rifles and shotguns (a simpler ban on sales of handguns was included in the crime control bill passed last spring) prohibit the interstate sales of ammunition and prevent the sale of rifles and shotguns to persons under 18 years of age.

But the House, in passing the legislation in early July, and then the Senate Judiciary Committee, in reporting out the legislation, attached several amendments that in the opinion of the Justice and Treasury Departments would weaken if not nullify the controls over the interstate sales of guns and ammunition.