

Senate Action on Ammunition

A Vote to Ease Gun Act

Washington

The Senate voted yesterday to repeal existing controls over the sale of rimfire ammunition used in both sporting rifles and cheap handguns.

If approved later by the House, this would mark the second easing of ammunition restrictions since the gun control law was enacted just four years ago.

It was .22-caliber rimfire ammunition that killed Rob-

ert F. Kennedy in June, 1968.

The move to ease controls came on a vote of 71 to 21 as the Senate continued debate on a bill designed to halt the manufacture and sale of snub-nosed, easily concealed handguns, such as the so-called "Saturday night special" used in many crimes.

With this action, the Senate now appears prepared to tighten controls over such handguns while at the same

time removing restrictions on the .22-caliber rimfire ammunition used extensively in the guns already in private hands.

Final Senate action on the bill is scheduled late today. Gun control hearings have been held by the House Judiciary Committee but it is uncertain whether final House action will come this year.

As enacted in 1968, after long years of debate, the gun control act included requirements that sellers of

ammunition keep records on the name, age and residence of each purchaser, the date of sale and the type and amount of the purchase.

REPEAL

A year later, at the insistence of the nation's sportsmen, Congress repealed reporting requirements covering shotgun ammunition and other ammunition "suitable for use only in rifles generally available in commerce."

This earlier exemption did not include .22-caliber rim-

fire ammunition because it is not used exclusively in rifles. Since then, .22-caliber rimfire has become the most popular sporting ammunition for rifles, and sportsmen launched a new drive to exclude it from reporting requirements.

Gun control forces sought to retain the controls, arguing that .22-caliber rimfire is equally popular for use in cheap handguns.

SUPPORT

But the sportsmen won the backing of the Nixon administration. Treasury Department officials told Congress that because of the heavy volume of sales of this kind of ammunition, record-keeping requirements have become so burdensome that they tend to detract from enforcement of other provisions of the gun control law.

Furthermore, Treasury and Justice Department offi-

cialists said they knew of no instance in which such recordkeeping had aided in investigation and prosecution of crimes.

The Senate also approved an amendment by Senator Peter Dominick (Rep-Colo.) to crack down on those who use or carry firearms during the commission of a federal felony. The vote was 84 to 11.

Under the Dominick amendment, such felons would be subject to an additional sentence of one to ten years for a first offense and two to 25 years for a second offense. Judges would have the option of suspending sentences for certain youthful first offenders.

The Senate rejected an amendment by Senator Adlai Stevenson (Dem-Ill.) to register all handguns and license handgun owners. The vote was 75 to 16.

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