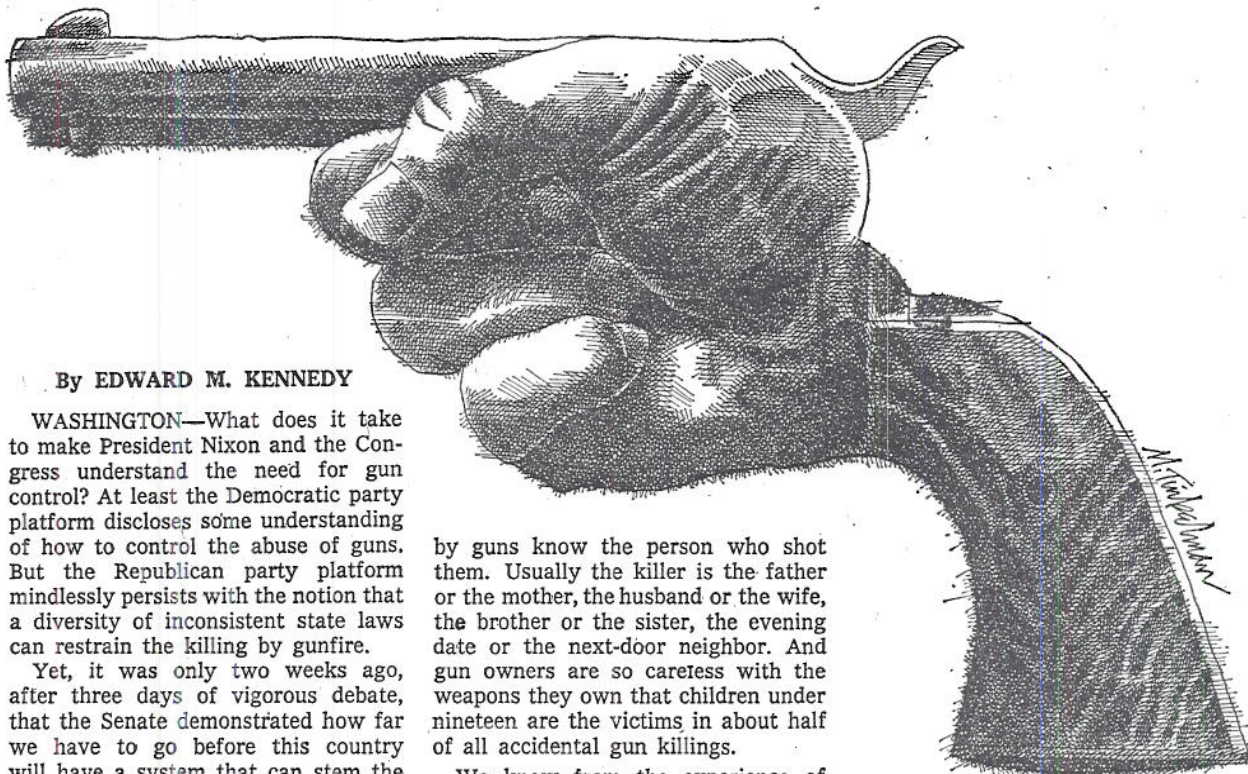


'First in Guns, Last in Controls'



Murray Tinkelman

By EDWARD M. KENNEDY

WASHINGTON—What does it take to make President Nixon and the Congress understand the need for gun control? At least the Democratic party platform discloses some understanding of how to control the abuse of guns. But the Republican party platform mindlessly persists with the notion that a diversity of inconsistent state laws can restrain the killing by gunfire.

Yet, it was only two weeks ago, after three days of vigorous debate, that the Senate demonstrated how far we have to go before this country will have a system that can stem the bloody flow of gun killing. After years of slaughter, and the record of killings that could have been avoided, the Senate had a chance to act but looked the other way.

True, we can take some consolation from the fact that the Senate voted to outlaw junk handguns—the "Saturday night specials." But compared to the enormity of the problems the Senate left untouched, the consolation is small indeed—like removing a bucket of sand from the Sahara when we could have made a real oasis.

We know the dimensions of the problem. Thirty million handguns are owned today by people who live in the United States. Added to the 100 million rifles and shotguns our citizens now possess, American households comprise the largest and most deadly civilian arsenal in the history of mankind.

Shopkeepers and homeowners use guns for self-protection. Sportsmen use them for target shooting and hunting. Criminals use them for robbery, assault and murder. And in every city, town and village in the country, people use guns to slaughter one another and to kill and maim themselves.

America's annual orgy of destruction produces 3,000 accidental deaths by guns each year, as well as 7,000 gun suicides and 10,000 gun murders.

Over 70 per cent of the people killed

by guns know the person who shot them. Usually the killer is the father or the mother, the husband or the wife, the brother or the sister, the evening date or the next-door neighbor. And gun owners are so careless with the weapons they own that children under nineteen are the victims in about half of all accidental gun killings.

We know from the experience of other nations that it does not have to be this way. In Japan, with fully half our population, fewer than thirty people are murdered by guns each year. In all of England and Wales with a population of fifty million people, there were only twenty-nine gun homicides in 1970. While America lags behind, the compassionate and progressive efforts of other nations are as current as today's headlines. In Canada they're taking steps to stem the tide of gun abuse caused by American weapons brought across the border. In Israel, the Government is now responding to the growing popular outcry for strong reform. Why is it that of all the developed nations in the world, America ranks first in death by guns and last in gun control?

Nearly two million new handguns will still be put into the American marketplace each year, unaffected by the Senate bill. Worse, in a frightening step backward, the Senate attached a rider to the bill that will completely eliminate all controls on the sale of .22-caliber rimfire ammunition.

Four billion rounds of such ammunition are sold each year in the United States. Police records show that in 1968, 42 per cent of all handgun murders and 65 per cent of all long-gun murders were committed with .22-caliber rimfire ammunition.

Yet, the Nixon Administration enthusiastically

supported this amendment. They said that the existing controls had never helped to solve a crime. But what about all the crimes that were deterred because such controls were on the books?

Three successive Attorneys General of the United States had vigorously supported strong gun laws. The nation was making progress until 1969, when John Mitchell broke the chain. Suddenly we had an Attorney General who listened to the noisy minority and began to spout the distorted philosophy of the gun lobby. All of the mindless arguments against strong gun control were piped into the Senate chamber by the Administration and the National Rifle Association.

Gun control is another vital issue on which the people of America are far ahead of the politicians. Invariably, since 1959, Gallup polls have reported that at least two-thirds of the American public favor strong gun laws. Yet, an amendment I proposed to register firearms and license gun owners received only 11 Senate votes.

Until we get an Administration that believes in gun control, the killing will go on. Congress cannot do the job alone. That's why we need a President who isn't a captive of the N.R.A., who isn't willing to trade his principles for the handful of votes the gun nuts can deliver.

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