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July 3, 1968

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

THE WHITE HOUSE MADE PUBLIC TODAY
THE FOLLOWING LETTER FROM THE
PRESIDENT TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE
SENATE AND THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE
OF REPRESENTATIVES

July 3, 1968

Dear Mr. President: (Dear Mr. Speaker:)

When crime's lengthening shadow falls on the Nation's Capital, it touches not only the citizens who live and work here -- it reaches out to every American.

Unique in the life of the Nation, Washington is the only local community for which the Federal Government bears a special and direct responsibility. But the problems of crime in the District are not unique. They are the problems of any county, city or community in America:

- Police that must be better trained, equipped and paid.
- Court systems that must be modernized and correctional institutions that must be revitalized.
- Guns that must be kept out of criminal or irresponsible hands.

At the national level we have moved to strengthen the network of local law enforcement. With the Safe Streets Act, large scale federal aid is now available -- for the first time -- to help States and cities and the District plan and carry out comprehensive anti-crime campaigns.

In the first major gun control step in over three decades, the Safe Streets Act outlaws the deadly mail order traffic in pistols and handguns and their sales to minors. Now the Congress should extend the protection of sane and sensible gun control laws to every citizen by:

- Banning the interstate sales of rifles and shotguns and ammunition, as I requested on June 6.
- Requiring nationwide registration of all firearms and the licensing of all those who possess guns, as I requested on June 24.

But in the exercise of responsibility for the Nation's Capital, the Nation can rightfully expect the Congress to do more -- to make Washington a showcase of safety and security for all the people.

Washington's policemen are among the Nation's finest. In the critical hours of unrest and violence which gripped the city they performed the most difficult missions with great skill. But their ranks must be enlarged and their numbers reinforced. On May 27 I asked the Congress to add -- on an urgent basis -- 1,000 more police officers to the force, increasing the authorized strength by about one-third.

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I am today submitting a Fiscal 1969 amendment to the D. C. budget in the amount of \$11.5 million to help pay for these needed police reinforcements in the Nation's Capital.

I urge the Congress to develop a sound and responsible financial formula for this program so that the 1,000 new policemen can be recruited, trained, equipped and deployed into the neighborhoods and streets as swiftly as possible.

A larger police force will help us attack crime wherever and whenever it strikes -- and will help to prevent crime before it strikes.

It is clear, however, that in the District of Columbia effective crime control requires effective gun control -- strong, complete and comprehensive. But the laws in the Nation's Capital are woefully weak:

- They cover only handguns, not rifles or shotguns.
- The handgun law coverage is inadequate, allowing many irresponsible persons to own these small but deadly weapons.

Washington's gun control laws invite evasion and circumvention. They must be tightened and toughened.

I have recommended strong gun control laws for the Nation's Capital each year for the past four years. Each year the Congress has failed to act. Each year crimes at gunpoint have increased.

In 1965, when I called for the registration of all pistols "as the first step," there were 1,786 major crimes -- murders, robberies, serious assaults -- involving deadly weapons. The Congress did not act in 1965.

In 1966, when I again proposed that law, major crimes at gunpoint increased to 1,850. The Congress did not act that year.

In 1967, when I called for more effective gun control legislation, crimes at gunpoint had risen to 2,479. Still the Congress did not act.

In early 1968, I again renewed my recommendations for District gun control legislation. Although crimes at gunpoint are still rising, the Congress has still not taken action.

The need for strong gun control laws in the Nation's Capital is imperative and it is urgent.

Part of that need can be met by the action of municipal groups, and they are moving now to carry out their responsibilities:

- The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments, composed of representatives of the District of Columbia and neighboring cities and counties, has unanimously recommended a strong uniform gun-control ordinance.
- The City Council of the District of Columbia has been holding hearings to strengthen gun control regulations for Washington.

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But the D. C. City Council is constrained by legislation enacted at the turn of the century and during the days of Prohibition -- legislation which has lost its relevance to the problems of modern life. The Council, for example, is now restricted in the penalty it can set for gun law violations: in most cases only a maximum \$300 fine and no more than a token jail sentence. These penalties are far too low. They will remove the teeth from any attempt at effective gun control.

The City Council -- within the full reach of its power -- will continue to pursue its efforts to develop strong and effective gun control regulations. But it is clear that those powers must now be strengthened.

I recommend enactment of legislation to strengthen the authority of the D. C. City Council to issue gun control regulations that will effectively protect the safety of the entire community -- with penalties far stronger than prescribed by existing law.

In this letter, I have submitted two concrete and critical proposals to help increase public safety in the District.

As I have repeatedly emphasized -- and as I stated in signing the Safe Streets Act ten days ago: "Crime will never yield to demagogic lament -- only to action."

Today -- again -- I call upon the Congress to take that action for the Nation's Capital.

Sincerely,

LYNDON B. JOHNSON

Honorable Hubert H. Humphrey
President of the Senate
Washington, D. C.

Honorable John W. McCormack
Speaker of the
House of Representatives
Washington, D. C.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JULY 3, 1968

Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT

In New York City this morning, bullets from a sniper's gun have brought heartbreak and horror. Again, senseless tragedy has struck at gun point. I call upon the Congress and all of the people of America to pass the gun control measures which are needed to protect the American people against insane and reckless murder by gunfire.

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OFFICE OF THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY

THE WHITE HOUSE

REMARKS OF THE PRESIDENT
AT THE SIGNING OF THE
GUN CONTROL BILL

AT 11:50 A.M. EDT

Secretary Fowler, Attorney General Clark, Chairman Celler, Distinguished Members of the Senate and the House, Distinguished Guests:

Today we begin to disarm the criminal, and the careless and the insane. All of our people who are deeply concerned in this country about law and order should hail this day. In our democracy, crime control is a community problem. We would not have it any other way.

For the other way would be the police state and all of its tragic consequences.

The Federal Government can supplement -- but can never supplant -- local efforts to combat crime in the United States. Only in the last five years has the Federal Government fully grasped that opportunity. The Government can probe the reasons for crime and the methods of its control. The Government has done this -- through the Presidential Crime Commission that was created in 1965. The Government can strike against organized crime, whose poison spills across state lines, and the Government has done this. 1960 saw only 19 racketeers indicted in the United States courts. Last year, 1,160 were indicted -- the highest ever. We have strengthened that fight through the Anti-Racketeering Act that the Congress passed.

The Government can now help to stimulate new local crime-fighting programs. We have done this -- through the Law Enforcement Assistance Act that Congress passed. The Government can now help better train and better equip and better pay the policeman on the local beat. It can help to modernize courts and correctional systems. The Government has done all of this through the Safe Streets Act, which we signed last June. The Government can help communities tackle the serious problem of teen-age crime. And the Government has done this -- with new legislation passed at this session of Congress to stop juvenile delinquency and the careers in crime that juvenile delinquency breeds.

MORE

The Government can help protect its citizens against the random and reckless violence of crime at gun point. We have come here to the Cabinet Room today to sign the most comprehensive gun control law ever signed in this nation's history.

Some of you may be interested in knowing what this bill does:

-- It stops murder by mail order. It bars the interstate sale of all guns and the bullets that load them.

-- It stops the sale of lethal weapons to those too young to bear their terrible responsibility.

-- It puts up a big "off-limits" sign, to stop gun runners from dumping cheap foreign "\$10 specials" on our shores.

MORE

Congress adopted most of our recommendations. But this bill -- as big as this bill is -- still falls short, because we just could not get the Congress to carry out the requests we made of them. I asked for the national registration of all guns and the licensing of those who carry those guns. For the fact of life is that there are over 160 million guns in this country -- more firearms than families. If guns are to be kept out of the hands of the criminal, out of the hands of the insane and out of the hands of the irresponsible, then we just must have licensing. If the criminal with a gun is to be tracked down quickly, then we must have registration in this country.

The voices that blocked these safeguards were not the voices of an aroused nation. They were the voices of a powerful gun lobby that has prevailed for the moment in an election year.

But the key to effective crime control remains, in my judgment, effective gun control. And those of us who are really concerned about crime just must -- somehow, some day -- make our voices felt. We must continue to work for the day when Americans can get the full protection that every American citizen is entitled to and deserves -- the kind of protection that most civilized nations have long ago adopted. We have been through a great deal of anguish these last few months and these last few years -- too much anguish to forget so quickly.

So now we must complete the task which this long-needed legislation begins. We have come a long way. We have made much progress -- but not nearly enough.

END

(AT 11:55 A.M. EDT)