

The President's Remarks Upon Signing the Bill Into Law. October 22, 1968

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 5 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 teenage 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.

The Government can help protect its citizens against the random and the 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 bans 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 the shores of our country.

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.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:50 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

As enacted, the bill (H.R. 17735) is Public Law 90-618

At the ceremony, the President also signed Executive Order 11432, "Control of Arms Imports." For the text of the Executive order, see the following item.