

September 4, 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: GEOFF SHEPARD
FROM: WILLIAM E. TIMMONS
SUBJECT: Gun Control Legislation

Reference your August 20 memo to Laird and August 27 option report to the President on subject.

I recognize the President has said "I'm a liberal on gun control" and has publicly committed to control of Saturday Night Specials. I concur in the need for a Presidential listening session with proponents and opponents representing their views.

However, as you know, our hard-core support in Congress oppose any legislation in this area because the "criminal can always get a gun." Gunowners generally are "Middle Americans" the group from which the President draws his strongest backing on the real Big Issues. Also attention should be given to a measure the gun lobby will not actively oppose.

We must also be alert to criticism that the President did nothing in this area until he was threatened recently in New Orleans -- so this legislation is in his self-interest.

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

August 31, 1973

MEMORANDUM FOR: WILLIAM E. TIMMONS
FROM: TOM C. KOROLOGOS *TK*
SUBJECT: Shepard's Gun Memo

We have only two choices on this gun control question. A) Go all the way, all out with a complete control; or B) Do nothing.

The issue spooks me greatly because if we decide to go with a bill we surely will try to find some compromise thing that NRA likes and that appeases the Eastern libs which puts us in the middle, puts our friends on the Hill in bad light and gains nothing. If we send up a half-way bill, then Kennedy, Hart and the rest will confront us with arguments we cannot resist on an issue we cannot enforce, cannot defend and which would open us up to being soft on crime (prosecutors want to ban all guns).

On the other hand, since November 1962, we have been insisting that we let the states do it. So far, there has been virtually nothing happen in the states. (Even Lindsay says it cannot be done by states since New York has a tough law and New Jersey a soft one, and everybody goes to New Jersey to buy a gun to use in New York). Out West, the distances are different and the impact, of course, would be less severe.

The thing that worries me is that the President's hard core support comes from the gun-folk and obviously we need support these days. This doesn't mean NRA members. It means those who own sporting guns. Guns are a culture out west. Last week in Utah, every pickup truck I saw had a gun rack in the rear window. These people are not the "hated gun lobby", they're Americans.

Neither McGovern nor the President raised gun control in the election. It was dormant and obviously both saw the danger of coming down for or against it.

August 31, 1973

On the Hill, Hruska, of course, is our leader on this. He is ambivalent at the moment and probably will do anything the President wants him to do. Indeed, the President promised to send up new gun legislation after the Stennis shooting and we do run the risk of someone else getting shot and then the blame would be on us for doing nothing.

I recommend we do indeed, start something internally. A meeting with those suggested in Geoff's paper plus Hruska would be fine, except Roman will just listen and we run the risk that the President may take advantage of his ambivalence and we might go with something we will be sorry about later.

Roman has a better picture of this than anyone. He has had to take the heat for years and knows where the politics are. If we do nothing, he runs the risk of being in an awkward position if another Stennis-type shooting occurs.

There are several courses to consider in the internal considerations, such as "tracing" (in lieu of licensing) which means have some super bureau trace guns used in crimes, mandatory sentences, take the discretion away from the judges altogether in crimes with guns.

Lurking in the background is the President's personal statement: "I'm a liberal on gun control." Also, we should remember the President has been stalked by killers which I have not, and he may have a different attitude.

Summary

I vote for a "talk" meeting and then "tough it out" by doing nothing and hope nobody gets shot in the next three years.