Robert Byrd Asks Death Penalty For Attempts to Kill Candidates

Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-W. Va.) called yesterday for the death penalty for persons who assassinate or attempt to assassinate candidates for President.

Byrd, Senate Democratic whip, told his colleagues in a speech, "A lot of these nuts are going around the country who are willing to attempt an assassination because they will be confronted only with a few years in prison.

"I'm convinced the only way to stop some of these people is to confront them with the certainty that, whether or not they are successful, they will get the death penalty."

Byrd also endorsed efforts to ban the sale or manufacture of "Saturday night specials" handguns—cheaply produced and readily available revolvers frequently used in murder attempts. A Senate subcommittee has agreed in principle to such legislation.

Rep. Emanuel Celler (D-N.Y.) announced that his House Judiciary Committee would hold hearings on gun control legislation "promptly" after Congress returns May 30 from a Memorial Day recess.

"Gun violence continues to increase and ... the outrageous assault on Gov. George Wallace serves to underscore the urgent need for stricter federal controls on firearms," said Celler in a statement. "It is time that Congress took concrete steps to reduce gun crimes in this country."

The executive vice president of the National Rifle Association, Maxwell C. Rich, said restricting the ability to possess firearms would accomplish little toward preventing such shootings.

"When it happens you get this cry for gun control and we don't think it really relates to what we're talking about or what they're talking about. Registration," Rich said.

He said the association, which claims 1 million members, favors mandatory enforcement of present laws and strong penalties for violators rather than new laws.

"We don't think total registration or elimination or confiscation of handguns is going to solve the problem," Rich added.