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Barack Obama

Statement on Umpqua Community College Shootings

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There's been another mass shooting in America -- this time, in a community college in Oregon.

That means there are more American families -- moms, dads, children -- whose lives have been changed forever. That means there's another community stunned with grief, and communities across the country forced to relieve their own anguish, and parents across the country who are scared because they know it might have been their families or their children.

I've been to Roseburg, Oregon. There are really good people there. I want to thank all the first responders whose bravery likely saved some lives today. Federal law enforcement has been on the scene in a supporting role, and we've offered to stay and help as much as Roseburg needs, for as long as they need.

In the coming days, we'll learn about the victims -- young men and women who were studying and learning and working hard, their eyes set on the future, their dreams on what they could make of their lives. And America will wrap everyone who's grieving with our prayers and our love.



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But as I said just a few months ago, and I said a few months before that, and I said each time we see one of these mass shootings, our thoughts and prayers are not enough. It's not enough. It does not capture the heartache and grief and anger that we should feel. And it does nothing to prevent this carnage from being inflicted someplace else in America -- next week, or a couple of months from now.

We don't yet know why this individual did what he did. And it's fair to say that anybody who does this has a sickness in their minds, regardless of what they think their motivations may be. But we are not the only country on Earth that has people with mental illnesses or want to do harm to other people. We are the only advanced country on Earth that sees these kinds of mass shootings every few months.

Earlier this year, I answered a question in an interview by saying, "The United States of America is the one advanced nation on Earth in which we do not have sufficient common-sense gun-safety laws -- even in the face of repeated mass killings." And later that day, there was a mass shooting at a movie theater in Lafayette, Louisiana. That day! Somehow this has become routine. The reporting is routine. My response here at this podium ends up being routine. The conversation in the aftermath of it. We've become numb to this.

We talked about this after Columbine and Blacksburg, after Tucson, after Newtown, after Aurora, after Charleston. It cannot be this easy for somebody who wants to inflict harm on other people to get his or her hands on a gun.

And what's become routine, of course, is the response of those who oppose any kind of common-sense gun legislation. Right now, I can imagine the press releases being cranked out: We need more guns, they'll argue. Fewer gun safety laws.

Does anybody really believe that? There are scores of responsible gun owners in this country --they know that's not true. We know because of the polling that says the majority of Americans understand we should be changing these laws -- including the majority of responsible, law-abiding gun owners.

There is a gun for roughly every man, woman, and child in America. So how can you, with a straight face, make the argument that more guns will make us safer? We know that states with the most gun laws tend to have the fewest gun deaths. So the notion that gun laws don't work, or just will make it harder for law-abiding citizens and criminals will still get their guns is not borne out by the evidence.

We know that other countries, in response to one mass shooting, have been able to craft laws that almost eliminate mass shootings. Friends of ours, allies of ours -- Great Britain, Australia, countries like ours. So we know there are ways to prevent it.



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And, of course, what's also routine is that somebody, somewhere will comment and say, Obama politicized this issue. Well, this is something we should politicize. It is relevant to our common life together, to the body politic. I would ask news organizations -- because I won't put these facts forward -- have news organizations tally up the number of Americans who've been killed through terrorist attacks over the last decade and the number of Americans who've been killed by gun violence, and post those side-by-side on your news reports. This won't be information coming from me; it will be coming from you. We spend over a trillion dollars, and pass countless laws, and devote entire agencies to preventing terrorist attacks on our soil, and rightfully so. And yet, we have a Congress that explicitly blocks us from even collecting data on how we could potentially reduce gun deaths. How can that be?

This is a political choice that we make to allow this to happen every few months in America.

We collectively are answerable to those families who lose their loved ones because of our inaction. When Americans are killed in mine disasters, we work to make mines safer. When Americans are killed in floods and hurricanes, we make communities safer. When roads are unsafe, we fix them to reduce auto fatalities. We have seatbelt laws because we know it saves lives. So the notion that gun violence is somehow different, that our freedom and our Constitution prohibits any modest regulation of how we use a deadly weapon, when there are law-abiding gun owners all across the country who could hunt and protect their families and do everything they do under such regulations doesn't make sense.

So, tonight, as those of us who are lucky enough to hug our kids a little closer are thinking about the families who aren't so fortunate, I'd ask the American people to think about how they can get our government to change these laws, and to save lives, and to let young people grow up. And that will require a change of politics on this issue. And it will require that the American people, individually, whether you are a Democrat or a Republican or an independent, when you decide to vote for somebody, are making a determination as to whether this cause of continuing death for innocent people should be a relevant factor in your decision. If you think this is a problem, then you should expect your elected officials to reflect your views.

And I would particularly ask America's gun owners -- who are using those guns properly, safely, to hunt, for sport, for protecting their families -- to think about whether your views are properly being represented by the organization that suggests it's speaking for you.

And each time this happens I'm going to bring this up. Each time this happens I am going to say that we can actually do something about it, but we're going to have to change our laws.

And this is not something I can do by myself. I've got to have a Congress and I've got to have state legislatures and governors who are willing to work with me on this.

I hope and pray that I don't have to come out again during my tenure as President to offer my condolences to families in these circumstances. But based on my experience as President, I can't guarantee that. And that's terrible to say. And it can change.



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May God bless the memories of those who were killed today. May He bring comfort to their families, and courage to the injured as they fight their way back. And may He give us the strength to come together and find the courage to change.

Thank you.