Another infuriating, but unsurprising, gun tragedy

By Editorial Board  October 1

“OMG THERE’S someone shooting on campus.” That was the first in a series of awful reports on social media Thursday that only got worse as the day went on. “Students are running everywhere. Holy God.” Then: “Lock down and do not come to campus until further notice.” And then this: “-7 to 10 dead-As many as 20 injured-Shooter reportedly detained.”

As we write this, there is much that is not known about the morning’s mass shooting at Umpqua Community College in rural southwestern Oregon. The coming days will fill in the details about the violence that authorities said killed 10 people and injured seven on a beautiful fall day. We will learn the names of those who were killed and hear about their hopes and dreams and the people grieving their loss. Those who witnessed the attack will tell of their experiences, and hopefully those who were injured will recover. There will be information about the gunman, who authorities said was killed in an exchange of gunfire with officers. Theories will be offered and tested regarding his motives, as if there can be any sense made of a rampage like this.

But we don’t have to wait to know that one factor in the tragedy that unfolded on this college campus is the all-too-easy availability of guns in this country. And we shouldn’t have to wait for Congress to enact laws to combat what is clearly a crisis of gun violence.

The United States leads the world in mass shootings. So far this year, there have been 294 mass shootings — incidents in which four or more people are killed or injured by gunfire — and that’s only 274 days into the year. Those numbers, drawn from the Mass Shooting Tracker, don’t include the thousands of others who every year are shot in murders, assaults, suicides and accidents.

But Congress — in its cowardly obeisance to the National Rifle Association — refuses to enact sensible gun control laws, including ones backed by a vast majority of Americans, such as bringing gun-show and Internet gun sales into some reasonable regulatory framework. “It cannot be this easy for somebody who wants to inflict harm on other people to get his or her hands on a gun,” President Obama said Thursday night in an address that gave voice to his frustration. He called on the American public to help him push for change, noting, “I hope and pray that I don’t have to come out again . . . to offer my condolences to families under these circumstances. But based on my experience as president, I can’t guarantee that.”

This time it was Roseburg, Ore., and, said the county fire marshal, “something like this affects a lot of people.” The same was true in Charleston, S.C.; Lafayette, La.; Newtown, Conn.; Tucson; and Blacksburg, Va. How sad it is, and how infuriatingly unnecessary, that such tragedy begins to feel so unsurprising.

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