

Editorial: How many more innocents must die before we take action?

By The Bee Editorial Board

Nine people are dead. A lone gunman is to blame.

The gun he was wielding? It might've been one he got from his father for his 21st birthday, no paperwork required. The state where he lives? South Carolina has some of the loosest gun-control laws in the country.

A woman carries a single rose as she enters TD Arena for a public vigil at the College of Charleston for those killed. | CURTIS COMPTON TNS

We know this story all too well.

We know it from Sandy Hook Elementary School in Connecticut, where a lone gunman killed 20 children and six adults. We know it from Aurora, Colorado, where a lone gunman killed 12 people in a packed movie theater. We know it from Tucson, where a lone gunman opened fire in a parking lot, killing six and wounding 13, including then-U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords.

And now there's Charleston.

Police say Dylann Storm Roof, 21, walked into the historic Emanuel AME Church on Wednesday evening. He asked for the pastor, Clementa Pinckney, who happened to be a state senator. He sat down among the black congregants for 49 minutes and participated in Bible study. Then he opened fire. One witness said he reloaded five times.

The U.S. Justice Department is investigating the shooting as a hate crime.

How many more of these shootings must occur before we, as a nation, do something about it?

That was what a clearly frustrated President Barack Obama wanted to know Thursday: "Once again, innocent people were killed in part because someone who wanted to inflict harm had no trouble getting their hands on a gun."

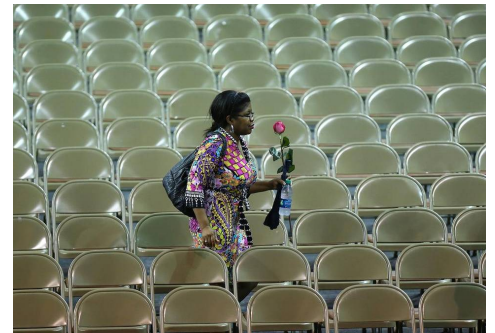
We share his frustration. In Washington, pro-gun lobbyists scuttle measure after sensible measure to rein in the proliferation of guns. Congress is deadlocked over requiring tougher background checks to weed out people who have a history of serious mental illness.

Gun control advocates have all but given up on federal legislation. Instead, the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence has turned its attention to the states, with some success. Since the 2012 shooting at Sandy Hook, six states have passed stricter gun laws.

In other states, particularly in the rural Midwest and South, many Americans remain steadfastly opposed to any new restrictions. They see mass shootings as rare, unpreventable events.

They don't see how creating more laws will help, and so they see no reason to stop law-abiding gun owners like themselves from amassing arsenals of military-grade weapons. South Carolina is one of those bastions.

There, you can buy guns in bulk, online or at gun shows. You don't need a permit and you don't need to register it. If you receive a gun as a gift, as Roof did, you don't have to submit to a background check.



California is the opposite of South Carolina. We have some of the strictest gun laws in the country. But even here, not everyone agrees that's a good thing.

And people die at the hands of lone gunmen.

We've experienced it here in Fresno, where a depraved man, Marcus Wesson, orchestrated the mass murder of nine of his family members March 12, 2004.

No one wants to see another Charleston.

It is in our power to do something about it. We have to find the collective will.