

Shooter still at large after 5 motorists injured on Interstate-75 in Kentucky

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A multi-agency manhunt, consisting of local and state law enforcement, FBI, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF), and the US Marshal Service is presently underway within the state of Kentucky after a gunman opened fire on vehicles driving on Interstate 75, just south of Lexington, wounding five people.

At the time of this writing the search for the suspected shooter, 32-year-old Joseph A. Couch, has entered into its fifth day.

The shooter took position on a ledge overlooking Interstate 75 near Exit 49 in Laurel County, from which he indiscriminately shot at motorists traveling along both north- and south-bound lanes.

The shooting spree in Kentucky occurred three days after a mass shooting at the Apalachee High School in Winder, Georgia. Four people, two students and two teachers, were killed there by 14-year-old Colt Gray.

The Kentucky shooting also came less than a week after shootings along Interstate 5 in Washington state between Seattle and Tacoma. Five people were injured after shots were fired from a vehicle traveling on the interstate, though no suspect has been identified.

It was the second random shooting incident on this stretch of Interstate 5 in less than a year. In December, Marco Antonio Ramos Valdez, 28, was charged with two counts of first-degree assault after he opened fire on at least six vehicles, injuring one person.

In Kentucky, at least a dozen vehicles were riddled with bullet holes, two still unidentified victims received minor injuries resulting from a wreck which ensued during the gunfire. Meanwhile, five people, identified as Rebecca Puryear, Norma Liberia, Renee Walker, Janet Booth and Erick Gavin, suffered serious gunshot wounds. Although all five victims were “severely wounded,” four have been released from the hospital and all are expected to recover.

Puryear recounted the event to CNN and described herself as a “walking miracle.” She, along with her husband and their four-year-old son, were driving home when they heard the gunshots. As she pulled over to the side of the road, she “looked down and was just pouring blood.” A bullet had entered the passenger side window and struck her right arm, penetrating into her chest before exiting her left arm. Though she was released from the hospital later that night, it is reported that she will need to have surgery.

As of right now, it is unclear as to the motives behind the mass shooting.

Couch, the shooter still at large, served in the Army Reserve between 2013 and 2019 as a combat engineer with no deployments. Court documents obtained through an affidavit reveal that he has had no prior convictions; however, he was charged in February of this year with terroristic threatening. During an altercation between him and a neighbor, Couch brandished an AR-15-style rifle and threatened to kill the neighbor, whose 9-year-old daughter was standing beside him. The case was eventually dismissed due to the victim failing to appear in court.

On the day of the shooting, Couch had purchased an AR-15 rifle with a mounted Holosun sight, along with 1,000 rounds of ammunition. He sent out two text messages: one to the mother of his child, while the other was sent to the dispatch of the local sheriff’s office, indicating that he was “going to kill a lot of people.”

As Couch fled the scene he left behind the majority of the ammunition, the AR-15, his vehicle, as well as a cell phone with the battery disconnected, preventing law enforcement from pinging his location. It is suspected that he may now be hiding out in the Daniel Boone National Forest near I-75.

Drones and other aerial technology have been utilized but the search area is vast, encompassing thousands of acres. The terrain is difficult, consisting of cliffs, sinkholes, caves, culverts, creeks, rivers and dense brush.

The prolonged nature of the search has caused a state of panic within the local community. Eighteen of the surrounding public and private schools, including university campuses, have either closed their doors or have begun to operate virtually, fearing a continuation of violence.

Since the shooting took place, the official political response has been the typical echo chamber of empty rhetoric. This is evident with Democratic Kentucky Governor Andy Beshear and other state politicians offering their “thoughts and prayers.” Pro-Democratic pundits and reporters in the local press have issued empty calls for gun reform.

For his part, London Mayor Randall Weddle stated, “My heart is to see that my community is whole again. That people understand that this travesty, this act of violence, doesn’t define us as a community.”

There is nothing more “American” than mass shootings and gun-related deaths in the United States. But what is the common thread tying together all these outbursts of savage violence?

Weddle promoted the falsehood that mass shootings are isolated individual episodes, saying that “the growing crisis of mental health issues in this country” needs to be addressed. Though mental health crises no doubt play a role in mass shootings, laying the blame on an individual’s mental health obscures the social catalysts that trigger mass violence.

These incidents are all products of a society in an advanced stage of degeneration, which finds expression in the repeated eruptions of mass violence. The stage is set by ongoing attacks on social infrastructure, wages, working conditions and democratic rights, which are all on the chopping block to make workers pay for the crisis of world capitalism and the US turn toward unending war abroad.

With only two months before the US presidential election, neither candidate from the major capitalist parties could be bothered to comment on the attempted slaying of multiple people by an armed gunman who is currently on the loose. This demonstrates the indifference that the capitalist class has in addressing

the mass shootings that have become endemic in American society.

There will be no end to mass gun violence in the US under either major capitalist party, Democrat or Republican, who offer no solutions outside of empty rhetoric. Meanwhile they have normalized mass death through their “let it rip” approach to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, that has caused 1.4 million deaths in the US alone, and through the prosecution of wars throughout the world.

It is only the working class, engaged in a principled political struggle against the source of all violence and oppression, the capitalist system, which can put an end to these expressions of social pathology.



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