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Remarks in an Exchange With Reporters Prior to Departure for Dayton, Ohio
August 7, 2019

The President. Hello, everybody. So, we're going to Dayton first, and then we're going to El Paso. And we'll be meeting with first responders, law enforcement, some of the victims, and paying my respects and regards. I'll be going with the First Lady. And it's a terrific opportunity, really, to congratulate some of the police and law enforcement. The job they've done was incredible. Really incredible.

Shootings in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio

Q. Mr. President, no doubt—I don't think anybody will argue—this is a difficult time in our country for all of us. So, from your heart, from your mind, what do you say to your critics that believe it's your rhetoric that is emboldening White nationalists and inspiring this anger?

The President. So my critics are political people. They're trying to make points. In many cases, they're running for President, and they're very low in the polls. A couple of them, in particular, are very low in the polls. If you look at Dayton, that was a person that supported, I guess you would say, Bernie Sanders, I understood; Antifa, I understood; Elizabeth Warren, I understood. It had nothing to do with President Trump.

So these are people that are looking for political gain. I don't think they're getting it. And, as much as possible, I've tried to stay out of that.

Q. How has your rhetoric——

Tenor of Political Rhetoric/Shooting in Dayton, Ohio

Q. Mr. President, Senator Ted Cruz today said that people on both sides of the political aisle need to tone down the rhetoric. Do you agree with that?

The President. Well, I do agree, but I think we have toned it down. We've been hitting—we've been getting hit left and right from everybody. Many of the people, I don't know. A couple of people from Texas—political people from Texas that aren't doing very well. I guess somebody said—the mayor—I had one very nice conversation with the mayor of Dayton; could not have been nicer. And then, she goes and says I tried to call her. Well, I spoke to her, and I didn't receive any call.

So they're trying to make political points. I don't think it works because, you know, I would like to stay out of the political fray.

As I was saying, and as just came out, the Dayton situation—he was a fan of Antifa. He was a fan of Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren. Nothing to do with Trump. But nobody ever mentions that.

Gun Violence/Mental Health

Q. [*Inaudible*]

The President. Say it?

Q. [*Inaudible*]—supported Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders. Should they be blamed for the shooting like—[*inaudible*]?

The President. No, I don't blame Elizabeth Warren, and I don't blame Bernie Sanders in the case of Ohio. And I don't blame anybody. I blame—these are sick people. These are people that are really mentally ill, mentally disturbed. It's a mental problem.

And we're going to be meeting with the Members of Congress. I've already got meetings scheduled. And I have had plenty of talks over the last 2 days. And I think something is going to be come up with. We're going to come with something that's going to be, really, very good, beyond anything that's been done so far.

Gun Control Legislation

Q. Do you support bringing the Senate back to consider legislation on——

The President. Well, we're going to see where we are. We're dealing with leadership right now. And you know, you have two sides that are very different on this issue and, let's say, all good people. But two sides that are very different. If we get close, I will bring them back. But it has to be—you know, we have to see where we are with leadership.

Normally, this has been, really, a decision—Congress gets together, and they try and do something. But if you look over the last 30 years, not a lot has been done.

Background Check System

Q. [*Inaudible*]—Mr. President, the background check bill already that has passed the House, what good—[*inaudible*]?

The President. Well, I'm looking to do background checks. I think background checks are important. I don't want to put guns into the hands of mentally unstable people or people with rage or hate, sick people. I don't want to—I'm all in favor of it.

Q. What do you say to people who don't want the Government to—[*inaudible*]?

Gun Control Reform Efforts/Background Check System

Q. What about assault rifles? A lot of people would like to see them banned. What is your position?

The President. Well, I can tell you that there is no political appetite for that at this moment. If you look at the—you could speak, you could do your own polling. And there's no political appetite from it—from the standpoint of legislature.

But I will certainly bring that up. I'll bring that up as one of the points. There's a great appetite—and I mean a very strong appetite—for background checks. And I think we can bring up background checks like we've never had before. I think both Republican and Democrat are getting close to a bill on—they're doing something on background checks.

Q. Mr. President——

Q. [*Inaudible*]—to own an assault rifle?

U.S. Defense Relationship With South Korea

Q. [*Inaudible*]—between the U.S., South Korea, and Japan, exports are—[*inaudible*].

The President. Yes. South Korea and I have made a deal. They've agreed to pay a lot more money toward the United States. As you know, we've got 32,000 soldiers on South Korean soil, and we've been helping them for about 82 years. And we get nothing. We get virtually nothing. And South Korea and I have made a deal where they're paying a lot more money, and they're going to pay a lot more money. And the relationship is a very good one.

But I felt, all along, I felt for years it was a very unfair one. So they've agreed to pay a lot more, and they will agree to pay a lot more than that. And we're with them. We're with them.

Gun Control Reform Efforts/Mental Health

Q. Mr. President, you banned bump stocks. Would you consider a ban on these huge, large-capacity magazines?

The President. So you have to have a political appetite within Congress. And, so far, I haven't—not seen that. I mean, I can only do what I can do. I think there's a great appetite to do something with regard to making sure that mentally unstable, seriously ill people aren't carrying guns. And I've never seen the appetite as strong as it is now. I have not seen it with regard to certain types of weapons.

Rise in Prevalence of Hate Groups

Q. Mr. President, how concerned are you about the rise in White supremacy? And what are you going to do about it?

The President. I am concerned about the rise of any group of hate. I don't like it. Any group of hate, I am—whether it's White supremacy, whether it's any other kind of supremacy, whether it's Antifa, whether it's any group of hate, I am very concerned about it. And I'll do something about it.

Q. Joe Biden says you have more in common with George Wallace than George Washington. Mr. President, what's your reaction to that?

Tenor of Political Rhetoric/China-U.S. Trade

Q. Do you believe that your rhetoric has any impact on—[*inaudible*]?

The President. No, I don't think my rhetoric has at all. I think my rhetoric is a very—it brings people together. Our country is doing incredibly well. China is not doing well, if you look at the trade situation.

China just admitted yesterday that they've been a currency manipulator, first time they've ever been called out. Companies are moving out of China by the thousands, and our country is doing very well. We're going to see how it all works out. Somebody had to do this with China, because they were taking hundreds of billions of dollars a year out of the United States. And somebody had to make a stand. No, I think our country is doing really well.

Q. Mr. President, do you still believe——

China-U.S. Trade

Q. What is your reaction to the market reaction to the trade war? And what's next with China?

The President. I think the market reaction is anticipated. I would have anticipated. I would have maybe anticipated even more. But ultimately, it's going to go much higher than it ever would have gone, because China was like an anchor on us. China was killing us with unfair trade deals. The people that allowed that to happen are a disgrace. China, what they were doing to us, for years and years, taking hundreds of billions of dollars out, stealing intellectual property, targeting our farmers. All of that is ending, and they understand that.

Q. Will you continue to—[*inaudible*]?

Gun Control Legislation

Q. Mr. President, you still believe there's no political appetite for an assault weapons ban, but as the leader of this country, do you personally believe people should be able to buy assault weapons?

The President. That's right. I'll be convincing some people to do things that they don't want to do, and that means people in Congress. But you've got a lot of people on one side, and you have a lot of people in the other. But I can—I have a lot of influence with a lot of people, and I want to convince them to do the right thing.

Q. But do you personally think——

The President. And I will tell you, we've made a lot of headway in the last 3 days, a lot of headway.

Illegal Immigration/Immigration Reform/Border Security

Q. Mr. President, do you still believe that illegal immigration into this country is an "invasion"? You and the shooter in El Paso used that same language. Do you regret that?

The President. I think that illegal immigration—you're talking about illegal immigration, right? Yes? I think illegal immigration is a terrible thing for this country. I think you have to come in legally. Ideally, you have to come in through merit. We need people coming in, because we have many companies coming into our country. They're pouring in. And I think illegal immigration is a very bad thing for our country. I think open borders are a very bad thing for our country.

And we're stopping; we're building a wall right now. We won the lawsuit in the Supreme Court 2 weeks ago. The wall is well under construction. It's being built at a rapid pace. We need that. We need strong immigration laws. But we want to allow millions of people to come in, because we need them. We have companies coming in from Japan, all over Europe, all over Asia. They're opening up companies here. They need people to work. We have a very low unemployment rate.

So I believe we have to have legal immigration, not illegal immigration.

Q. But do you regret using the term "invasion" for it?

Q. Mr. President, what do you say to Joe Biden?

China-U.S. Trade/Intellectual Property

Q. Are you watching the stock market's reaction to China, sir?

The President. I am. I think the market reaction is to be expected. I might have expected even more. At some point, as I just said, we have to take on China. They've been taking—look, they've been taking us to the cleaners for 25 years. This should have been done long before me as a President. You know the story better than anybody. You know it better than I do, frankly. Hundreds of billions of dollars a year taken out of our country. Stealing intellectual property.

And you know what? We, right now, we're sitting on top. We have money pouring in. We have powerful companies, strong companies. China is losing so many—they're losing—thousands and thousands of companies are leaving China now, because of the tariffs. And we're in a very good position as to whether or not a deal would—will be made. I will tell you this: China would like to make a deal very badly.

Former Vice President Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

Q. Mr. President, Joe Biden. Joe Biden says you have more in common with George Wallace than George Washington.

The President. Well, you know, Joe is a pretty incompetent guy. I've watched his interviews. I've watched what he said and how he said it. And I wouldn't have rated him very high in the first place, but Joe Biden has truly lost this fastball, that I can tell you.

Thank you.

Q. Mr. President——

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:13 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Connor Stephen Betts, suspected gunman in the shooting in the Oregon District of Dayton, OH, on August 4; Sens. Bernard Sanders and Elizabeth A. Warren; and Mayor Nannette L. Whaley of Dayton, Ohio. A reporter referred to H.R. 8.

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