

Trump denounces anti-Semitism in forceful condemnation

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump on Tuesday condemned recent threats against Jewish community centers in the U.S. as “painful reminders” of lingering prejudice and evil, his first full-throated comments on the rise of anti-Semitic venom after pressure for him to speak out forcefully.

With his somewhat delayed denunciation, Trump sought to reset his relationship with American Jews, which has been strained by a recent White House statement on the Holocaust, comments by some of his supporters and his own fractious exchange with a reporter for an Orthodox Jewish publication.

Trump’s latest remarks, made at the newly opened National Museum of African American History and Culture, marked the first time he directly addressed recent incidents of anti-Semitism. Earlier in the day, the White House put out a statement denouncing “hatred and hate-motivated violence” but not mentioning Jews, the weekend vandalism at a Jewish cemetery or multiple threats to community centers Monday.

Eleven Jewish community centers across the country received telephoned bomb threats, according to the JCC Association of North America. Like three waves of similar phone calls in January, the new threats proved to be hoaxes, the association said in a statement. In addition, as many as 200 headstones were damaged or tipped over at a Jewish cemetery in suburban St. Louis late Sunday or early Monday.



AP Photo/Evan Vucci
President Donald Trump tours the National Museum of African American History and Culture on Tuesday in Washington.

“The anti-Semitic threats targeting our Jewish community and community centers are horrible and are painful and a very sad reminder of the work that still must be done to root out hate and prejudice and evil,” Trump said. He did not outline what that might entail.

On Monday, Trump’s daughter Ivanka Trump wrote on Twitter, “We must protect our houses of worship & religious centers,” and used the hashtag #JCC. She converted to Judaism ahead of her 2009 marriage to Jared Kushner. She joined her father at the African-American museum tour.

The FBI said it was joining with the Justice Department’s

Civil Rights Division to investigate “possible civil rights violations in connection with threats.”

Ryan Lenz, spokesman for the Southern Poverty Law Center, said it has seen an uptick in incidents since Trump’s election. “People are much more willing to express their bigoted selves than they were prior to the election,” Lenz said.

Trump’s statement Tuesday followed a series of episodes that put some American Jews on edge.

Last week at a news conference, Trump tangled with a reporter from an Orthodox Jewish publication, cutting him off as he asked about a rise in bomb threats. The president, who seemed to interpret the query

as an attack on him personally, said it was “not a fair question” and went on to say he was the “least anti-Semitic person that you’ve ever seen in your entire life.”

In January, the White House drew criticism for a statement commemorating the Holocaust that did not mention the murder of Jews, in contrast with previous administrations. The statement, criticized by the Anti-Defamation League and others, was defended by the White House as inclusive.

And throughout his campaign, Trump was criticized for what some saw as belated and inadequately forceful denunciations of hateful rhetoric by some of his supporters.

Trump’s top strategist Stephen Bannon came under fire for stories published by Breitbart News, which he’d led before joining Trump’s campaign. During the campaign, Trump at times appeared to play to stereotypes, including tweeting out an anti-Hillary Clinton image that included what appeared to be a Star of David atop a pile of money.

Still, Trump has won strong support in some circles as an impassioned backer of Israel.

Trump welcomed Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to the White House last week and signaled a new closeness between the countries as he withheld clear support for an independent Palestine and declared he could endorse a one-nation solution to the long dispute between Palestinians and Israel.

At a joint news conference, Trump called Israel a symbol of “survival in the face of genocide.”

Trump’s Tuesday comments were praised by several Jewish organizations.

Jonathan Greenblatt, chief executive of the Anti-Defamation League, the Jewish civil rights group that has been highly critical of Trump, called the statement an “important first step.”

“I think the Jewish community has been looking for leadership from the president. I was encouraged to hear him step up and say that proactively and now we need to look for the follow-up so we can move from words to action,” Greenblatt said.

Matt Brooks, executive director of the Republican Jewish Coalition, said in a statement that his group applauds “President Trump and his daughter Ivanka for their strong words in condemning these unspeakable actions.”

Still, some said Trump had not done enough. On its Facebook page, the Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect called Trump’s Tuesday comments a “Band-Aid on the cancer of Antisemitism that has infected his own Administration.”

White House spokesman Sean Spicer pushed back against those remarks at a news conference Tuesday. He said Trump has spoken forcefully against hate, arguing, “It’s ironic that no matter how many times he talks about this that it’s never good enough.”

Trump working on trans bathroom guidelines

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration is working on a new set of directives on the use of school bathrooms by transgender students, the White House said Tuesday.

The announcement alarmed LGBT groups across the country that have urged President Donald Trump to safeguard Obama-era guidelines allowing students to use school restrooms that match their gender identity, not their assigned gender at birth.

White House spokesman Sean Spicer did not provide any details on the new guidelines that are being prepared by the Justice Department, but said Trump has long held that such matters should be left to the states, not the federal government, to decide.

“I think that all you have to do is look at what the president’s view has been for a long time, that this is not something the federal government should be involved in, this is a states’ rights issue,” Spicer said.

The Obama administration’s guidance, issued last May, held that transgender students can access restrooms



AP Photo/Elaine Thompson, File

In this 2016 file photo, a new sticker is placed on the door at the ceremonial opening of a gender neutral bathroom at Nathan Hale High School in Seattle.

and participate in school athletics according with the gender they identify with. Schools were also instructed to treat students in line with their expressed gender identity without requiring any medical proof.

While the move was hailed by rights organizations, it was attacked by conservative groups, which called it federal overreach and an infringement on the personal space and safety of all other students.

A patchwork of state laws and policies on the issue is emerging.

Fifteen states have explicit protections for transgender students, and many individual school districts in other states have adopted policies that recognize students on the basis of their gender identity, said Sarah Warbelow, legal director of the Human Rights Campaign. Just one state, North Carolina, has enacted a law restricting students’ bathroom access to their sex at birth. But so far this year, lawmakers in more than 10 states are considering similar legislation, according to the National Conference of State Legislators.

Vanita Gupta, who was head of the Justice Department’s Civil Rights Division under President Barack Obama, blasted the Trump administration’s attempt to alter the guidelines.

“To cloak this in federalism ignores the vital and historic role that federal law plays in ensuring that all children, (including LGBT students) are able to attend school free from discrimination,” Gupta said in a statement.

But Ryan Anderson, a senior research fellow with the conservative Heritage Foundation, said the Obama guidelines were unlawful because Title IX protects students based on their sex, not their gender identity.

He said that those directives violated the rights of other students, especially girls who may have suffered from sexual abuse in the past and do not want to be exposed to male anatomy.

He said that students, parents and teachers should work out “win-win” solutions at the local level, such as equipping schools with single-occupancy restrooms or locker rooms.

Milo Yiannopoulos apologizes for remarks, quits Breitbart

NEW YORK (AP) — Polarizing right-wing writer Milo Yiannopoulos was by turns apologetic for comments he made about sexual relationships between boys and men and adamant he had been the subject of “a cynical media witch hunt” on Tuesday as he spoke after resigning as an editor at Breitbart News.

Yiannopoulos opened his remarks to reporters by saying two men, including a priest, had touched him inappropriately when he was between the ages of 13 and 16.

“My experiences as a victim led me to believe I could say anything I wanted to on this subject, no matter how outrageous,” he said. “But I understand that my usual blend of British sarcasm, provocation and gallows humor might have come across as flippancy, a lack of care for other victims or, worse, advocacy. I am horrified by that impression.”

The British writer said he was resigning from Breitbart, which helped make him a star, because it

would be “wrong to allow my poor choice of words to detract from my colleagues’ important reporting.”

The apology followed days of criticism from fellow conservatives after the release of video clips in which Yiannopoulos appeared to defend sexual relationships between men and boys as young as 13.

In one of them, Yiannopoulos, who is gay, said relationships between boys and men could “help those young boys discover who they are and give them security and safety and provide them with love and a reliable sort of rock, where they can’t speak to their parents.”

On Monday, he was disinvited from the Conservative Political Action Conference after video of his remarks was promoted through social media.

Publisher Simon & Schuster announced it would cancel the publication of his upcoming book. Yiannopoulos said the book had already received interest from others and will be published this year.



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