

Trump denounces hate groups by name two days after rally

By JONATHAN LEMIRE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Bowing to pressure from right and left, President Donald Trump condemned white supremacist groups by name on Monday, declaring “racism is evil” after two days of public equivocation and internal White House debate over the deadly race-fueled clashes in Charlottesville, Virginia.

In a hastily arranged statement at the White House, Trump branded members of the KKK, neo-Nazis and white supremacists who take part in violence as “criminals and thugs.”

The groups are “repugnant to everything that we hold dear as Americans,” he said.

In his initial remarks on the violence Saturday, Trump did not single out the groups and instead bemoaned violence on “many sides.” Those remarks prompted stern criticism from fellow Republicans as well as Democrats, who urged him to seize the moral authority of his office to condemn hate groups.

Trump’s softer statement on Saturday had come as graphic images of a car plowing into a crowd in Charlottesville were playing continually on television. White nationalists had assembled in the city to protest plans to take down a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, and counter-protesters gathered in opposition. Fights broke out, and then a man drove into the opponents of the white supremacists. One woman was killed and many more badly hurt. Twenty-year-old James Alex Fields Jr. of Ohio is charged with second-degree murder and other counts.

The president had indicated to advisers before his initial statement Saturday that he wanted to stress a need for law and order, which he did. He later expressed anger to those close to him about what he perceived as the media’s unfair assessment of his remarks, believing he had effectively denounced all forms of bigotry, according to outside advisers and White House officials.

Several of Trump’s senior advisers, including new chief of staff John Kelly, had urged him to make a more specific condemnation, warning that the negative story would not go away and that the rising tide of criticism from fellow Republicans on Capitol Hill could endanger his legisla-



People fly into the air as a vehicle drives into a group of protesters demonstrating against a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Va., Saturday.
Ryan M. Kelly/The Daily Progress via AP



President Donald Trump speaks about the deadly white nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Va., Monday in the Diplomatic Room of the White House in Washington.
AP Photo/Evan Vucci

tive agenda, according to two White House officials.

Aides were dispatched to Sunday talk shows but struggled to explain the president’s position. A stronger statement was released — but attributed only to an unnamed spokesperson.

Tougher condemnations began Sunday night with Vice President Mike Pence, traveling in South America, declaring that “these dangerous fringe groups have no place in American public life.”

On Monday, Trump had planned to interrupt his 17-day working vacation at his New Jersey golf club to travel to Washington for an announcement he hoped would showcase some tough talk on China’s trade practices.

But by the time he arrived at midmorning, it was clear all other messages would be drowned out until he said more about Charlottesville.

Trump returned to a White House undergoing a major

renovation. With the Oval Office unavailable, he worked from the Treaty Room as aides drafted his remarks.

Reading from a teleprompter, he made a point of beginning with an unrelated plug for the strength of the economy under his leadership. Then, taking pains to insist “as I said on Saturday,” Trump denounced the hate groups and called for unity.

“We must love each other, show affection for each other and unite together in condemnation of hatred, bigotry and violence,” he said.

Trump for the first time mentioned Heather Heyer by name as he paid tribute to the woman killed by the car.

At the trade event later in the day, he was asked why it took two days for him to offer an explicit denunciation of the hate groups.

“They have been condemned,” Trump responded before criticizing some media as “fake news.”

Hate-watch groups agree rally was largest in a decade

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — Authorities have not provided a crowd estimate for the Saturday rally of white nationalists in Charlottesville that descended into chaos. But two organizations that track hate groups and were monitoring the event said it was the largest white supremacist gathering in a decade or more.

An Associated Press reporter and photographer who were on the scene all day estimated the white nationalist group at about 500 and the counterprotesters at double that, based on in-person observations and photos, including some taken from just above street level.

Southern Poverty Law Center spokeswoman Heidi Beirich told The Associated Press the next-biggest white supremacist rally her group knew of took place in 2002 in the nation’s capital and drew around 300 people.

Saturday was “a pretty big deal in this world,” she said.

BRIEFLY

Driver previously accused of beating mom

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — The driver charged with killing a woman at a white nationalist rally in Charlottesville was previously accused of beating his mother and threatening her with a knife, according to police records released Monday.

Samantha Bloom, who is disabled and uses a wheelchair, repeatedly called police about her son, James Alex Fields Jr., in 2010 and 2011, telling officers he was on medication to control his temper, transcripts from 911 calls show.



James Fields Jr.

Fields, 20, is accused of ramming his car into a crowd of counter-protesters on Saturday in Charlottesville, killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer.

Fields, described by a former high school teacher as an admirer of Adolf Hitler and Nazi Germany, was charged with second-degree murder.

A judge denied him bail Monday after the public defender’s office said it couldn’t represent him because a relative of someone in the office was injured in Saturday’s protest.

Protesters topple Confederate statue in North Carolina

DURHAM, N.C. (AP) — Protesters in North Carolina toppled a nearly century-old statue of a Confederate soldier Monday at a rally against racism.

Activists in Durham brought a ladder up to the statue and used a rope to pull down the Confederate Soldiers Monument that was dedicated in 1924. A diverse crowd of dozens cheered as the statue of a soldier holding a rifle fell to the ground in front of an old courthouse building that now houses local government offices.

Seconds after the monument fell, protesters began kicking the crumpled bronze monument.

“I was a little bit shocked people could come here and come together like that,” said Isaiah Wallace, who is black.

Wallace said he watched as others toppled the statue. He hopes other Confederate symbols elsewhere will follow.

“I feel like this is going to send shockwaves through the country and hopefully they can bring down other racist symbols,” he said.

White nationalist agenda grows

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — Emboldened and proclaiming victory after a bloody weekend in Virginia, white nationalists are planning more demonstrations to promote their agenda following the violence.

The University of Florida said white provocateur Richard Spencer, whose appearances sometimes stoke unrest, is seeking permission to speak there next month. And white nationalist Preston Wiginton had said he was planning a “White Lives Matter” rally at Texas A&M University in September, but the university later said it had been canceled.

Also, a neo-Confederate group has asked the state of Virginia for permission to rally at a monument to Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee in Richmond on Sept. 16, and other events are likely.

“We’re going to be more active than ever before,” Matthew Heimbach, a white nationalist leader, said Monday.



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