Trump says arm U.S. teachers; they love kids as others don't

President bucks NRA, backs raising age for buying assault rifles

AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin

President Donald Trump speaks to the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC), at National Harbor, Md., Friday.

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump told conservatives Friday that even Second Amendment supporters can get behind steps to fight gun violence in schools, offering a red-meat call for arming teachers and suggesting they would be more likely to protect students than a security guard who "doesn't love the children."

Trump said the armed officer who failed to confront the gunman in last week's school shooting in Parkland, Florida, was either a "coward" or "didn't react properly under pressure."

"He was not a credit to law enforcement," Trump told the Conservative Political Action Conference.

Trump tailored his talking points Friday to his conservative audience, pushing the idea of arming some teachers who are "gun-adept people" but making no mention of another proposal he's advanced in recent days that is opposed by the National Rifle Association: increasing the minimum age for buying assault rifles from 18 to 21.

During a later appearance with Australian Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull in which he again addressed gun violence, Trump declared the United States was "well on our way to solving that horrible problem" — even though the administration has yet to deliver a firm plan to Congress.

As for arming teachers, Trump said, the U.S. needs "people that can take care of our children" in schools. "A security guard doesn't know the children, doesn't love the children. This man standing outside of the school the other day doesn't love the children, probably doesn't know the children. The teachers love their children. They love their pupils."

His comments drew a rebuke from a top teachers' union leader. "Denigrating the work of campus security guards is reprehensible," said National Education Association President Lily Eskelsen García.

Trump got pushback, too, from Florida's Broward County, where last week's shootings took place. Said Superintendent Robert Runcie: "I am totally against arming teachers. They have a challenging job as it is."

Separately, Florida Gov. Rick Scott announced plans to put more armed guards in schools and to make it harder for young adults and some with mental illness to buy guns. He favors barring sales of all firearms to anyone under 21.

Trump, long supported by the NRA, has sought to maintain his backing among gun rights activists even as he has called for strengthening background checks and raising the minimum age for certain weapons purchases.

Trump said that past efforts to address school safety and gun violence had faded and "nothing ever gets done. We want to see if we can get it done." He added, "Most of it's just common sense. It's not 'do you love guns, do you hate guns.' It's common sense."

His remarks came at the end of a week that included meetings with students and teachers and state and local officials on ways to bolster school safety and address gun violence. He said the "evil massacre" of 17 people at the high school had "broken our hearts."

Trump has advanced a variety of ideas to counter gun violence, and the White House this week asked the Justice Department and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives for recommendations: everything from faster ballistics testing to more prosecutions for those who lie on gun background check forms.

The White House has said Trump will soon lay out a package of school and gun safety proposals for Congress to consider.

While Trump the president did not mention his proposal to increase age restrictions for the purchase of firearms, Vice President Mike Pence did at a separate event with the nation's governors. He said Trump had called for raising the age limit in an effort to work "with leaders in the Congress to bring this evil in our time to an end."

Democratic Connecticut Sen. Chris Murphy, an outspoken advocate for more gun restrictions after the 2012 elementary school shooting in Newtown, Connecticut, said he expected to meet with White House aides next week.

Trump said designating schools as "gun-free zones" has put students in "far more danger." He reiterated his push for "gun-adept teachers and coaches" to be able to carry concealed firearms and said it was "time to make our schools a much harder target for attackers — we don't want them in our schools."

If a teacher had been carrying a concealed firearm when a former student began firing at the Florida school, "the teacher would have shot the hell out of him before he knew what happened," Trump said.

Near the end of a roughly 75-minute speech, Trump recited the lyrics from the 1960s song, "The Snake," a campaign staple that served as an allegory to warn of what he views as the dangers of some refugees and immigrants being allowed into the United States.

BRIEFLY

NRA strikes a defiant tone, criticizes gun control advocates

WASHINGTON (AP) — Leaders of the National Rifle Association are accusing gun control advocates of exploiting the Florida school shooting, striking a defiant tone amid a renewed debate over guns and school safety.

NRA Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre, in his first public comments since the shooting in Parkland, Florida, said Thursday that NRA members mourn for the Florida victims, but at the same time he issued a searing indictment of gun control proponents for attempting to "exploit tragedy for political gain."

"They hate the NRA. They hate the Second Amendment. They hate individual freedom," LaPierre said at the Conservative Political Action Conference in Oxon Hill, Maryland, near the nation's capital.

LaPierre addressed the conservative activists shortly before President Donald Trump held a session with state and local leaders on gun safety at the White House.

The president said he had spoken to NRA leaders and expressed optimism that the nation's most prominent gun-owners organization would support his calls for raising the federal minimum age for buying or possessing certain weapons, enhancing background checks, addressing mental illness and banning the sale of bump stock devices.

NRA leaders did not address whether the federal government should raise the minimum age for young adults to buy weapons. A day earlier, the organization issued a statement saying it opposes raising the age limit.

"Evil walks among us and God help us if we don't harden our schools and protect our kids," LaPierre said. "The whole idea from some of our opponents that armed security makes us less safe is completely ridiculous."

More companies end ties with NRA as pressure mounts

NEW YORK (AP) — Three more companies said Friday they had ended discount programs with the National Rifle Association, as U.S. corporations take a closer look at investments, co-branding deals and other ties to the gun industry after the latest school massacre.

Petitions are circulating online targeting companies that offer discounts to NRA members on its website. #BoycottNRA has trended on Twitter.

Members of the NRA have access to special offers from partner companies on its website, ranging from life insurance to wine clubs. For a second consecutive day, companies listed on the site have cut ties to the group as it aggressively resists calls for stricter gun control in the wake of the mass shooting last week.

The insurance company MetLife Inc. discontinued its discount program with the NRA on Friday. The car rental company Hertz and Symantec Corp., the software company that makes Norton Antivirus technology, did the same.

Insurer Chubb Ltd. said Friday it is ending participation in the NRA's gun-owner insurance program. The program that provided coverage for people involved in gun-related incidents had been under scrutiny by regulators.

Those defections arrived a day after car rental company Enterprise Holdings, which also owns Alamo and National, said it was cutting off discounts for NRA members. First National Bank of Omaha, one of the nation's largest privately held banks, announced that it would not renew a co-branded Visa card with the NRA.

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