

POLITICS NEWS SPRINGFIELD

In call, Trump urges governors 'to dominate' with arrests or look 'like a bunch of jerks'; Pritzker hits back over White House rhetoric

Gov. Pritzker, who was on the call, called President Trump out on his past remarks, saying they were only making things worse.

By Tina Sfondeles | Updated Jun 1, 2020, 5:50pm CDT



President Donald Trump and Gov. J.B. Pritzker got into an argument during a teleconference Monday with all the nation's governors. | Tyler LaRiviere/Sun-Times; Alex Brandon/AP

In a teleconference call Monday morning with the nation's governors after a violent weekend of looting and arson, President Trump urged state leaders to “dominate” by sending people to “jail for a long period of time” and warned they’d look like “a bunch of jerks” if they didn’t heed his advice.

The words prompted Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker to immediately tell the president on the call that he is “extraordinarily concerned about the rhetoric that’s been used” by him.

"It's been inflammatory, and it's not OK for that officer to choke George Floyd to death, but we have to call for calm. We have to have police reform called for. We've called out our National Guard and our State Police, but the rhetoric that's coming out of the White House is making it worse," Pritzker said. "And I need to say that people are feeling real pain out there. And we've got to have national leadership in calling for calm and making sure that we're addressing the concerns of the legitimate peaceful protesters. That will help us to bring order."

Trump responded, "OK, well thank you very much, J.B. I don't like your rhetoric very much, either, because I watched it with respect to the coronavirus, and I don't like your rhetoric much, either. I think you could have done a much better job, frankly."

The president also told Pritzker the country needs "law and order."

"If we don't have law, we don't have a country," he said.

Police and protesters clashed across major cities in America as thousands took to the streets to protest the death of Floyd, yet another African-American killed while in police custody. A white police officer has since been fired and charged with third-degree murder. Millions of Americans are under a curfew to try to stem the violence.

"We're strongly looking for arrests," Trump said on the teleconference call, joined by Attorney General William Barr and Army General Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, according a source familiar with his remarks. Trump said he "fully agreed" with how Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz handled protests over the last few days.

"We got a lot of men. We have all the men and women that you need. But people aren't calling them up. You have to dominate," Trump said. "If you don't dominate, you're wasting your time. They're going to run over you. You're going to look like a bunch of jerks."

"And you have to arrest people, and you have to try people, and they have to go to jail for long periods of time," Trump said.

At the White House briefing after the call, White House press secretary Kayleigh McEnany said there will be "additional federal assets deployed across the nation," working with a "central command center in conjunction with state and local governments" to include Milley, Esper and Barr.

She said the president has the “authority to deploy forces across the country beyond the National Guard.” and offered no timetable. “I’m not going to get ahead of any actions that will be announced,” she said.

In the call with the governors, the president said he watched looting and violence on television in Philadelphia, Dallas and Los Angeles.

Trump said “it’s coming from the radical left.”

“Everyone knows it, but it’s also looters and it’s people who think they can get free stuff from running into stores and running out with television sets,” Trump said.

The president asked the governors: “Why aren’t you prosecuting them?”

He likened the “movement” to that of the Occupy Wall Street movement.

“It’s going to get worse and worse just like Occupy Wall Street. It was a disaster,” Trump said, adding “one day, somebody said that’s enough and they just went and wiped them out.”

“And after that, everything was beautiful and that was the last time we heard about it,” he said.

Trump called the looters and rioters “anarchists.”

“They’re anarchists, whether you like it or not. I know some of you guys have a different persuasion and that’s OK, I totally understand. I understand. I’m for everybody. I’m representing everybody. I’m not representing radical right, radical left. I’m representing everybody. But you have to know what you’re dealing with, and it’s happened before. It’s happened numerous times. And the only time it’s successful is when you’re weak.”

Trump noted an attack on the AFL-CIO headquarters in Washington, D.C., over the weekend, “which is very interesting,” he said.

Despite fires set ablaze during protests and looters smashing stores with baseball bats on Sunday, he said “Washington was under very good control, and we’re going to have it under more control.”

“We’re going to pull in thousands of people,” he said.

“But you’ve got to arrest people. You have to try people. You have to put them in jail for 10 years and you’ll never see this stuff again,” Trump said. And you have to let them know that. They’re trying to get people out on bail in Minneapolis. I understand they’re in there trying to get all these guys out on bail.”

Contributing: Lynn Sweet