

Trump tweets, stays out of sight for hours after shootings

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Highlight: BRIDGEWATER, N.J. (AP) - As the **nation** reeled from two mass shootings in less than a day, President Donald Trump spent the first hours after the tragedies out of sight at his New Jersey golf course, sending out tweets of support awkwardly mixed in with those promoting a celebrity fight and attacking his political foes.

Body

By JONATHAN LEMIRE

BRIDGEWATER, N.J. (AP) - As the **nation** reeled from two mass shootings in less than a day, President Donald Trump spent the first hours after the tragedies out of sight at his New Jersey golf course, sending out tweets of support awkwardly mixed in with those promoting a celebrity fight and attacking his political foes.

Americans did not glimpse the Republican president in the immediate aftermath of a shooting in El Paso, Texas, that killed at least 20 people and, hours later, one in Dayton, Ohio, that claimed at least nine lives. Not until Trump and the first lady prepared to fly back to Washington in the late afternoon Sunday did he appear before cameras.

"Hate has no place in our country, and we're going to take care of it," Trump declared before boarding Air Force One.

While connecting "hate" and mental illness to the shootings, Trump made no direct mention of gun laws, a factor brought up by Democratic officials and those seeking their party's nomination to challenge Trump's reelection next year. He also **ignored** questions about the **anti-immigration** language in a manifesto written by the El Paso shooter that mirrors some of his own.

Trump tried to assure Americans he was dealing with the problem and defended his administration in light of criticism following the latest in a string of mass shootings.

"We have done much more than most administrations," he said, without elaboration. "We have done actually a lot. But perhaps more has to be done."

Never seemingly comfortable consoling a **nation** in grief, Trump will be carefully watched for his response to the attacks, again inviting comparison to his predecessors who have tried to heal the country in moments of national trauma.

Investigators focused on whether the El Paso attack was a hate crime after the emergence of a racist, anti-immigrant **screed** that was posted online shortly beforehand. Detectives sought to determine if it was written by the man who was arrested.

In recent weeks, the president has issued racist tweets about four women of color who serve in Congress, and in rallies has spoken of an "invasion" at the southern border. His reelection strategy has placed racial animus at the forefront in an effort that his aides say is designed to activate his base of conservative voters, an approach not seen by an American president in the modern era.

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Trump also has been widely criticized for offering a false equivalency when discussing racial violence, notably when he said there were "very fine people, on both sides," after a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, that resulted in the death of an anti-racism demonstrator.

The shootings will likely complicate that strategy, and Democrats who are campaigning to deny Trump a second term were quick to lay blame at the president's feet.

"You reap what you sow, and he is sowing seeds of hate in this country. This harvest of hate violence we're seeing right now lies at his feet," Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey said on NBC's "Meet the Press." "He is responsible."

White House aides said the president has been receiving updates about both shootings.

"The FBI, local and state law enforcement are working together in El Paso and in Dayton, Ohio," Trump tweeted Sunday morning. "God bless the people of El Paso Texas. God bless the people of Dayton, Ohio."

His first tweet after the El Paso shooting on Saturday hit similar notes, with Trump calling it "terrible" and promising the full support of the federal government. But just 14 minutes later, he tweeted again, a discordant post wishing UFC fighter Colby Covington, a Trump supporter, good luck in his fight that evening. That was soon followed up with a pair of retweets of African American supporters offering testimonials to Trump's policies helping black voters, though the president polls very poorly with black people.

Trump's two eldest sons attended the UFC fight, while social media photos show that Trump stopped by a wedding at his Bedminster club on Saturday night.

The motive for the Dayton shooting, which happened in a popular nightlife district, was not immediately known. But Democrats pointed to the El Paso attack and blamed Trump for his incendiary rhetoric about immigrants that they say fosters an atmosphere of hate and violence.

Federal officials said they were treating the El Paso attack as a domestic terrorism case.

Trump's language about immigrants, and his hardline policies, loomed over the El Paso shooting.

He has described groups of immigrants as "infestations," declared in his campaign kickoff that many of those coming from Mexico were "rapists," deemed a caravan of Hispanic migrants as invaders and wondered why the United States accepted so many immigrants from "shithole countries" like Haiti, El Salvador and African nations. Critics also point to his campaign proposal to ban all Muslims from entering the United States, his suggestion that President Barack Obama was not born in the United States and his administration's efforts to curtail asylum and separate immigrant children from their parents at the border.

The president also has repeatedly been denounced for being slow to criticize acts of violence carried out by white nationalists, or deem them acts of domestic terrorism, most notably when he declared there were good people on "both sides" of the deadly clash in Charlottesville in 2017. The number of hate groups has surged to record highs under Trump's presidency, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

"He is encouraging this. He doesn't just tolerate it; he encourages it. Folks are responding to this. It doesn't just offend us, it encourages the kind of violence that we're seeing, including in my home town of El Paso yesterday," former Rep. Beto O'Rourke, a 2020 Democratic contender, said on CNN's "State of the Union." "He is an open, avowed racist and is encouraging more racism in this country. And this is incredibly dangerous for the United States of America right now."

Other Democratic candidates also slammed Trump's lack of response.

"We must come together to reject this dangerous and growing culture of bigotry espoused by Trump and his allies," tweeted Sen. Bernie Sanders of Vermont. "Instead of wasting money putting children in cages, we must seriously address the scourge of violent bigotry and domestic terrorism."

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And Pete Buttigieg said Trump is "condoning and encouraging white nationalism."

"It is very clear that this kind of hate is being legitimized from on high," Buttigieg, the mayor of South Bend, Indiana, said in an interview on CNN.

Trump ordered flags to be lowered in remembrance of both shootings.

Acting White House chief of staff Mick Mulvaney defended the president's response, saying Trump was "a combination of saddened by this and he's angry about it." Mulvaney told ABC's "This Week" that Trump's first call was "to the attorney general to find out what we could do to prevent this type of thing from happening."

"These are sick people," he said. "And we need to figure out what we can do to make sure this doesn't happen again."

Mulvaney focused on the challenges of mental illness and largely dodged the notion of supporting widespread gun control measures, though he pointed out the administration banned bump stocks, which help turn semi-automatic weapons into even more lethal automatic ones. Trump, who has enjoyed deep support from the National Rifle Association gun lobbying group, has stayed away from most gun control measures, including after being personally lobbied by survivors of last year's school shooting in Parkland, Florida.

The top Democrat in the Senate, Chuck Schumer, urged Majority Leader Mitch McConnell to call an emergency session to put a House-passed bill on universal background checks up for debate and a vote "immediately."

White House officials said there were no immediate plans for Trump to address the **nation**. Trump said Sunday he would be giving a statement on the situation Monday morning.

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Other presidents have used the aftermath of a national tragedy to reassure citizens, including when George W. Bush visited a mosque less than a week after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks to stand up for Muslims in the United States and when Obama spoke emotionally after mass shootings at the Sandy Hook school in Newtown, Connecticut, and a Charleston, South Carolina, church.

Trump has struggled to convey such empathy and support, and drew widespread criticism when he tossed paper towels like basketballs to hurricane victims in Puerto Rico. He has also, at times, seemed to welcome violence toward immigrants. At a May rally in Panama City Beach, Florida, Trump bemoaned legal protections for migrants and asked rhetorically, "How do you stop these people?"

"Shoot them!" cried one audience member.

Trump chuckled and said, "Only in the Panhandle you can get away with that statement."

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