

WASHINGTON NEWS

POLITICAL NOTEBOOK

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Cummings urges end to 'hateful rhetoric'

WASHINGTON — Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md., Wednesday called for an end to “hateful rhetoric” that inspires mass shooters.

In his first major speech in the nearly two weeks since President Trump called his Baltimore district a “rat and roddent infested mess” where “no human being would want to live,” Cummings did not directly address the comments but called for decency.

“Those at the highest levels of government must stop invoking fear, using racist language and encouraging reprehensible behavior,” he said at the National Press Club in Washington. “As a country, we finally must say that enough is enough. That we are done with the hateful rhetoric. That we are done with the mass shootings. That we are done with the white supremacists, domestic terrorists who are terrorizing our country and fighting against everything America stands for.”

Cummings repeated his invitation for Trump to visit his congressional district, which includes parts of Baltimore and Howard counties, where “the richest of the rich live.” “When you beat up on people who have had difficulties and challenges in their lives, it doesn't help them.”

— Washington Post

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Twitter freezes McConnell's account

WASHINGTON — Twitter locked Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell's campaign account from further activity Wednesday as punishment for its sharing of a video of a group of protesters screaming obscenities outside the Kentucky Republican's home.

The social media company will not unlock @TeamMitch unless it agrees to remove the video.

Kevin Golden, McConnell's campaign manager, criticized Twitter for having contradictory standards. “This morning, Twitter locked our account for posting the video of real-world, violent threats made against Mitch McConnell. This is a problem with the speech police in America today.”

The video shows protesters gathered outside McConnell's Louisville home Monday. A woman, identified by The Courier-Journal as Black Lives Matter Louisville leader Chanelle Helm, is heard on the video mocking McConnell's recent shoulder injury and saying he “should have broken his little, raggedy, wrinkled-ass neck.” She then yells, “Just stab the [expletive] in the heart, please.” Someone also yells, “Die!”

— Washington Post

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

House acts to compel McGahn testimony

WASHINGTON — The House Judiciary Committee asked a federal judge Wednesday to compel testimony from former White House counsel Donald McGahn, whom lawmakers consider a crucial witness in any potential impeachment proceeding against President Trump.

McGahn figured prominently in special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation of whether Trump obstructed justice during the Justice Department's probe of Russian interference in the 2016 election.

The committee subpoenaed McGahn in April but the White House blocked his testimony, claiming he had “absolute” immunity.

The complaint filed in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia escalates the monthlong feud between congressional Democrats and the president. It will be the first lawsuit Democrats have filed to force a witness to testify since they regained control of the House last fall.

— Washington Post

Democratic presidential candidates say Trump is fostering hatred, not fighting it

BY ALEXANDER BURNS AND KATIE GLUECK

NEW YORK TIMES

CHARLESTON, S.C. — Democratic presidential candidates lashed President Trump Wednesday with their sternest denunciations yet of his exploitation of racism for political purposes and resistance to gun control, in a day of biting criticism that also highlighted differences between Democrats over how best to understand the recent rise of hate crimes in America.

More than ever, it was clear that last weekend's massacres in El Paso, Texas, and Dayton, Ohio, had put Trump on the defensive and added fierce new urgency to Democratic efforts to engineer his ouster.

Trump has not accounted for the echoes of his own rhetoric about immigrants and minorities in the manifesto composed by the anti-immigrant gunman in Texas, and he has appeared far more focused on feuding with his critics than on striking a tone of healing.

Former Vice President Joe Biden, in one of the most fiery speeches of his campaign so far, argued Wednesday that Trump had both explicitly and implicitly “fanned the flames of white supremacy in this nation” with his language.

“Trump readily, eagerly attacks Islamic terrorism but can barely bring himself to use the words ‘white supremacy,’” Biden said in Burlington, Iowa. “And even when he says it, he doesn't appear to believe it. He seems more concerned about losing their votes than beating back this hateful ideology.”

Speaking in Charleston at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church, where a white supremacist gunman killed nine black worshippers in 2015, Sen. Cory Booker of New Jersey also blamed Trump for encouraging hatred. The weekend's violence, he said, was “sowed by those who spoke the same words the El Paso murderer did, warning of an ‘invasion,’” a word Trump has used to describe migrants approaching the Southern border.

And in El Paso, former Rep. Beto O'Rourke, who hails from that city, criticized the president shortly before his visit.

“We live in a country where we have a president who demonizes communities like this one, who vilifies immigrants, who says that those from Mexico are rapists and criminals, and warns of invasions and infestations,” he said. O'Rourke also told MSNBC that he believed Trump was a white supremacist.

Trump has emphatically denied that he is racist, and Wednesday, he dismissed reporters' questions about the role of his rhetoric in dividing the country, saying his language “brings people together.”

The extraordinary focus this week on white nationalism, gun violence and domestic terror appeared to reframe a chaotic presidential campaign as a searing moral debate about the racial history and cultural destiny of the United States.

Trump, who rose to power railing against the country's changing ethnic and cultural texture, contends that Democrats should be punished for opposing his immigration policies and rejecting the values of the rural white people who make up his base.

Democrats, meanwhile, are now arguing in the most explicit terms yet that white supremacists are receiving aid and comfort from the president. Where Democrats differ, it is largely over whether Trump is the country's



New York Times

Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., a Democratic presidential hopeful, speaks Wednesday at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C., where a white supremacist killed nine people in 2015.

chief affliction, or a symptom of deeper woes.

But if the starkest contrast this week has been between Trump and those vying to unseat him, the speeches Wednesday by several Democratic candidates also exposed important gradations in their worldviews. Booker spoke at considerable length on racism as an American heritage, while Biden discussed dark episodes from the past but leaned more heavily on nostalgia and triumphalism.

In Iowa, Biden acknowledged that American history was no “fairy-tale.” “I wish I could say that this all began with Donald Trump and will end with him,” he said. “But it didn't and I won't.”

But Biden also assailed Trump as representing a wild departure from the American political tradition, blaming him for stoking hatred and abandoning the unifying role past presidents have sought to play. He contrasted Trump's ambivalent response to racism and tragedy with the conduct of his predecessors, including Bill Clinton's response to the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 and George W. Bush's visit to a mosque after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001.

In a biting one-liner that has become a regular jab on the campaign trail, Biden said that Trump had “more in common with George Wallace than he does with George Washington.”

Speaking from the pulpit at the church known as Mother Emanuel, one floor above the room where the 2015 massacre took place, Booker eschewed that kind of nostalgia for the Founding Fathers in his own speech against violent racism.

Booker said instead that white supremacy had been “ingrained in our politics since our founding,” within the text of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. The present moment, he said, demanded both

federal action to regulate guns and investigate white nationalists and a clear-eyed confrontation of the past.

“Racist violence has always been part of the American story, never more so than in times of transition and times of rapid social change,” Booker said, linking the trauma of the last week to slavery and segregation, and “demagogues throughout generations who stoked racist and anti-immigrant hatred, often for votes, and then enshrined their bigotry into laws.”

Booker neither mentioned Trump by name, nor did he cast the president as an aberrational figure in American history, as Biden did. Instead, Booker urged a broad moral reckoning over racism and departed from his prepared remarks to call, in an echo of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., for the rise of a “generation that truly will be free at last.”

“There is no neutrality in this fight,” he said. “You are either an agent of justice or you are contributing to the problem.”

The speech by Booker, one of two leading black candidates for the Democratic nomination, had the potential to be one of the most important moments of his campaign, testing his power as a voice of moral clarity and racial justice after a week of national pain.

He has lagged in the polls, insisting on a message of healing that has at times clashed with his party's prevailing mood of hot indignation. But after months of toiling away in relative obscurity he had a standout performance in the second round of Democratic debates last week, besting Biden in a series of exchanges on race and criminal justice and displaying for a national audience the kind of sunny pugilism that has made him a force in New Jersey and in the Senate.

Few venues for Booker's message could have been as laden with symbol-

ism as the one he chose. A funeral for the victims of the massacre, by a gunman who has since been sentenced to die, became the site of one of the most memorable moments of former President Barack Obama's time in office. During the ceremony, he broke into a rendition of “Amazing Grace” and called both for the removal of the Confederate flag from South Carolina's capitol building and a remedy to “the mayhem that gun violence inflicts upon this nation.”

Biden and Booker have had plenty of company in their condemnations of Trump this week. The candidates have been all but unanimous in their descriptions of the president as a racist or as bearing some personal responsibility for the violence in El Paso.

Though Trump denounced white supremacy in his speech from the White House Monday morning, he has continued to batter his political rivals in divisive terms, railing on Twitter against O'Rourke, who has described Trump this week as an obvious racist. Trump mocked O'Rourke for taking “Beto” as a nickname — his birth name is Robert — tweeting that it was a “phony name to indicate Hispanic heritage.”

Speaking Wednesday at an El Paso park, O'Rourke praised his hometown as a safe, beautiful and welcoming place made stronger by its binationalism and the immigrants and asylum seekers who live there.

“Though we bore the brunt of this hatred and this racism and this intolerance and this violence, I believe this community also holds the answer,” O'Rourke said.

“The way that we welcome one another and see our differences — not as disqualifying or dangerous, but as a very source of our strength, as a foundation of our success — that needs to be the example to the United States of America today.”

Trump campaign hasn't paid El Paso police bills

BY DAVE LEVINTHAL

CENTER FOR PUBLIC INTEGRITY

President Trump has pledged the federal government will provide “whatever is needed” to help El Paso, Texas, recover from a mass shooting Saturday that killed 22 people.

But Trump's own 2020 re-election committee still hasn't paid hundreds of thousands of dollars in police and public safety-related bills and late fees that El Paso city officials say it owes from Trump's campaign visit on Feb. 11.

“The Trump campaign has not paid the invoice as of yet,” El Paso spokeswoman Laura Cruz-Acosta confirmed to the Center for Public Integrity late Monday morning.

Trump's re-election committee owes El Paso municipal government \$569,204, according to an invoice to the Trump campaign dated July 18. Of that amount, \$470,417 comes from

an initial bill El Paso sent Trump in March, with the rest attributable to late fees the city tacked on in June.

The amount could fund the annual salaries of several El Paso police officers, whom Trump on Monday praised along with other law enforcement officials for responding with “extraordinary grace and courage of American heroes.”

As of mid-Monday, Trump's campaign also had not paid a \$16,191 invoice for police and other public safety costs associated with a “Make America Great Again” rally on Oct. 12 in Lebanon, Ohio, city official Pam Stotts said in an email. Lebanon is about 20 miles south of Dayton, Ohio, where a gunman on Sunday killed nine people and injured 32 more outside a bar.

Trump's re-election committee did not respond to several emails and phone calls inquiring whether it will pay police and public safety bills sent to it by municipal governments, in-

cluding El Paso and Lebanon.

Trump visited El Paso and Dayton on Wednesday.

In all, at least 10 local governments — from Mesa, Ariz., to Erie, Pa. — are still waiting for Trump to pay public safety-related invoices they've sent his presidential campaign committee in connection with his political rallies, according to a Center for Public Integrity investigation in June.

In all, the bills total \$841,219. During political speeches, Trump routinely praises law enforcement officials and offers his support to them.

In a tweet Saturday after the El Paso shooting, he wrote that he is, “Working with State and Local authorities, and Law Enforcement” and pledged Texas Gov. Greg Abbott the “total support of Federal Government.” Presidential campaign committees are not generally obligated by federal law to pay public safety-related bills sent to them by municipalities that host pres-

idential candidates' campaign rallies. President Barack Obama, for example, often did not pay such bills during his 2012 re-election campaign.

Nevertheless, many presidential candidates over the years — including Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, during the 2016 election, and several Democratic presidential candidates running in 2020 — voluntarily cover expenses incurred by local police during campaign events.

The presidential campaign of former Rep. Beto O'Rourke, D-Texas, earlier this year paid a public safety bill El Paso government sent it.

They've argued it's the right thing to do to not burden city governments, which often struggle to balance their budgets, with additional expenses that could negatively affect police services.

The Center for Public Integrity is a nonprofit investigative news organization based in Washington, D.C.