

Vigils for victims of Pittsburgh shooting express anger over Trump's racist incitements

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Vigils continued Monday across the US in the wake of the mass killings Saturday at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, which left 11 people dead and six injured. Since the shooting tragedy, vigils and other gatherings have been held in many cities, including San Francisco, Detroit, Boston and New York.

Funerals for the eight men and three women who were killed are set to begin Tuesday. The victims range in age from 54 to 97 and include a married couple and two brothers.

Robert Bowers, the gunman, appeared in Federal Court Monday afternoon for an arraignment and was denied bail while he is being held over for trial. He faces at least 29 federal charges and the US attorney's office said it will seek the death penalty.

At the vigils, the common theme has been solidarity with the victims, the survivors and the Squirrel Hill community where the synagogue is located. But they have also expressed hostility to the hate speech from President Trump and the belief that the president has incited incidents of violence over the past week.

Last Wednesday, police arrested Gregory A. Bush in connection with the shooting deaths of two black people at a grocery store in Kentucky. He had tried to enter a predominantly black church just minutes before the fatal shootings.

On Monday, a suspicious package addressed to CNN headquarters in Atlanta was intercepted. The FBI said the package was "similar in appearance" to the 14 pipe bombs addressed to prominent Democrats and Trump critics and recently intercepted. Cesar Sayoc, 56, of Aventura, Florida, faces five federal charges in connection with the bomb packages.

At a press conference Monday afternoon, White House Press Secretary Sarah Sanders doubled down on White House claims that the president's whipping up of anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiments, and his incitements to violence, had nothing to do with the recent killings and mail bombs.

Asked by CNN's Jim Acosta to identify those in the media to whom the president was referring when he claimed that the "fake media" was fueling violence, Sanders replied: "I think it's irresponsible of a news organization, like yours, to blame responsibility of a pipe bomb that was not sent by the president—not just blame the president, but blame members of his administration for those heinous acts. I think that is outrageous and I think it's irresponsible."

Sanders also announced that the president and Melania Trump would be visiting Pittsburgh on Tuesday. There is widespread opposition in Pittsburgh to the Trumps making such a visit to the city.

According to the *Washington Post*, more than 35,000 people have signed an open letter by Pittsburgh Jewish leaders to President Trump opposing his coming to Pittsburgh until he denounces white nationalism and ends his attacks on minorities and his continuing assault on immigrants and refugees.

"President Trump, you are not welcome in Pittsburgh until you fully denounce white nationalism," reads the letter. It continues: "President Trump, you are not welcome in Pittsburgh until you stop targeting and endangering all minorities... [and] until you cease your assault on immigrants and refugees."

The letter was first circulated Sunday by the Pittsburgh Chapter of Bend the Arc, a Jewish organization that describes itself as "uniting

progressive Jewish voices across America to fight for justice for all.”

The former president of the Tree of Life synagogue, Lynette Lederman, told CNN on Monday: “The country can stop the hate speech. We know that it comes from the top... I do not welcome this president to my city because he’s the purveyor of hate speech.”

A protest against Trump’s appearance has been set for noon to 3 pm Tuesday in Pittsburgh. As of Monday evening, the location was being worked out with city officials.

Bend the Arc largely supports the Democratic Party. But the points raised in its open letter and the vast support it has received stand in stark contrast to the positions being taken by the Democratic Party, both locally in Pittsburgh and across the country.

A review of the statements, web sites and twitter accounts of local and state Democratic officials shows that they have made no mention of immigration or the refugee crisis. Nor have they clearly linked the anti-immigrant and anti-Semitic rhetoric used by Trump and the actions of far-right elements within his political base.

This is despite the fact that social media posts by Bowers show that he specifically targeted the Tree of Life synagogue because of its work with HIAS (formally known as the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society) to relocate refugees from war-torn Syria, Latin America and other parts of the world to the Pittsburgh area. He also used Trump’s phrase, “invaders,” to characterize the Central American workers in the caravan making its way through Mexico to the US border.

On the web and Twitter pages of Senator Bob Casey, Representatives Mike Doyle (Pittsburgh) and Conor Lamb (western Pennsylvania), Governor Tom Wolf and Pittsburgh Mayor Bill Peduto, none of them make a single reference to Bowers being motivated by the anti-immigrant rants and anti-Semitic allusions of the president.

Casey, Wolf, Doyle and Peduto all posted statements to the effect that more had to be done on gun control. Mayor Peduto mentioned Trump, but only to refute his proposal that synagogues employ armed guards. None of them denounce Trump’s persecution of immigrants or defend the impoverished workers in the caravan.

The silence of the Democratic Party officials is not an

accident or merely an election maneuver. Rather, the Democrats, like their Republican counterparts, support the crackdown on immigrants as a way to divert attention from the economic crisis and prepare similar attacks against the working class as a whole.



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