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Trump in trouble over 'Second Amendment' remark

The campaign says he was referencing gun-rights voter mobilization, but the remark was widely interpreted as a joke about using guns against his Democratic rival.

By **LOUIS NELSON** | 08/09/2016 03:44 PM EDT | Updated 08/09/2016 06:02 PM EDT

Donald Trump on Tuesday said "the Second Amendment people" may be the only way to stop Hillary Clinton from getting to appoint federal judges if she wins the presidential election in November.

"Hillary wants to abolish, essentially abolish, the Second Amendment," he said as an aside while smiling. "By the way, and if she gets to pick her judges, nothing you can do, folks. Although the Second Amendment people, maybe there is, I don't know. But I'll tell you what, that will be a horrible day."

The reference to the Second Amendment, the right to keep and bear arms, could be interpreted as a joke about using violence to stop Clinton or her judicial picks.

Trump was speaking at a rally in Wilmington, North Carolina, where he repeated his regular claim that Clinton intends to “abolish” the Second Amendment, presumably by appointing liberal justices to the Supreme Court. But Trump punctuated that line with an aside, suggesting that Second Amendment supporters might be in a position to stop her even if she’s elected.

The Trump campaign rejected the notion that Trump was inciting violence against Clinton or anyone else with his aside at the Wilmington rally. Instead, the campaign said the Manhattan billionaire was simply appealing to the collective political muscle Second Amendment supporters possess.

“It’s called the power of unification – 2nd Amendment people have amazing spirit and are tremendously unified, which gives them great political power,” Trump’s senior communications adviser Jason Miller said in a statement emailed to POLITICO. “And this year, they will be voting in record numbers, and it won’t be for Hillary Clinton, it will be for Donald Trump.”

Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, Trump’s running mate, said Trump was “of course not” advocating violence with his remarks. Pence was on stage at a town hall-style event in Lancaster PA when Trump made the remarks.

“Hillary Clinton has made it very clear that she wants to see changes in the right of law abiding citizens to keep and bear arms, and Donald Trump is clearly saying that people cherish that right. People who believe that firearms in the hands of law abiding citizens make our communities more safe not less safe should be involved in the political process and let their voice be heard,” Pence said in an interview with Philadelphia’s NBC10.

Clinton did not take any questions after her event in Miami on Tuesday, but reached for comment, Clinton campaign manager Robby Mook condemned the comments. “This is simple—what Trump is saying is dangerous. A person seeking to be the President of the United States should not suggest violence in any way,” he said in a statement.

Following Trump’s remark, the main super PAC supporting her, Priorities USA Action, immediately circulated the clip with the subject line, “Donald Trump Just Suggested That Someone Shoot Hillary Clinton.”

Congressional Democrats piled on. Sen. Elizabeth Warren tweeted that Trump "makes death threats because he's a pathetic coward who can't handle the fact that he's losing to a girl."

"I don't know if this statement is intended to incite violence, but Donald Trump is a reckless individual who will say or do anything," said Rep. G.K. Butterfield, a North Carolina Democrat and chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus. "That's inciteful to use language about the Second Amendment ... it should be denounced,"

Rep. Eric Swalwell, a California Democrat, called on Twitter for the Secret Service to investigate. "Donald Trump suggested someone kill Sec. Clinton. We must take people at their word. @SecretService must investigate #TrumpThreat," he wrote.

(Martin Mulholland, a spokesman for the Secret Service, did not directly address the question of whether the agency – which provides protection to both Trump and Clinton -- plans to investigate the remark, but he wrote in an email to POLITICO, "The Secret Service is aware of the comment.")

Sen. Chris Murphy, a Democrat from Connecticut, launched a series of tweets criticizing the comments: "Don't treat this as a political misstep. It's an assassination threat, seriously upping the possibility of a national tragedy & crisis," he wrote. "This isn't play. Unstable people with powerful guns and an unhinged hatred for Hillary are listening to you, @realDonaldTrump."

The National Rifle Association defended the first part of Trump's comment, in which Trump said that Clinton would appoint anti-Second Amendment judges to the Supreme Court. ".@RealDonaldTrump is right. If @HillaryClinton gets to pick her anti-#2A #SCOTUS judges, there's nothing we can do. #NeverHillary," the organization tweeted from its official Twitter account.

The group subsequently encouraged members to vote for pro-gun rights candidates. "But there IS something we will do on #ElectionDay: Show up and vote for the #2A! #DefendtheSecond #NeverHillary," the group wrote on its Twitter account.

Bob Owens, the editor of the NRA-linked BearingArms.com, initially tweeted disapproval of Trump's comments. "That was a threat of violence. As a REAL supporter of the #2A it's appalling to me," Owens tweeted. Bearing Arms had sponsored the May meeting of the NRA's lobbying arm where the group formally endorsed Trump.

Within two hours of posting that tweet, however, Owens deleted it and put up a link to a new blog post on Bearing Arms, contending that Trump's comments had been taken out of context.

"While he left himself open to be exploited by a serially dishonest media that has clearly chosen to support Hillary in this election, I don't see anything to suggest that he was threatening violence against Mrs. Clinton," he wrote.

Matthew Nussbaum, Sarah Wheaton, Nolan McCaskill, Gabriel Debenedetti and Burgess Everett contributed to this report.

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