

Statement from Paul Manna on events in Charlottesville, Virginia
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The events that transpired in Charlottesville, Virginia on August 11 and 12 of this year are a national tragedy. Neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and anti-Semites offend fundamental principles of equality, liberty, and democracy when they march in the nation's streets brandishing torches and threatening those around them with vile chants, such as "Jews will not replace us." In the wake of Charlottesville, all people should especially mourn the losses of Heather Heyer, H. Jay Cullen, and Berke M. M. Bates who died that weekend. Heyer, who was brutally murdered by an apparent white supremacist with his speeding vehicle, and Cullen and Bates, Virginia State Police officers who were on duty and responding to the day's events, should reside in our memories forever. Their deaths remind us that the United States remains an imperfect union, but one worth preserving and making more perfect each and every day.

Groups that preach hate and threaten violence, such as the neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and anti-Semites who descended on Charlottesville, are enemies of the nation's core values. These groups, assembled to celebrate their poisonous ideologies, undermine the more than two centuries of work that the people of the United States have put forth to "establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty." Working to achieve these lofty outcomes, of course, is what the preamble of the U.S. Constitution explains was the reason the nation was worth fighting for in the first place. And although American democracy and the First Amendment create protections that foster a capacious space for disagreement and the airing of offensive views, the country does not protect expressions of views that threaten others or incite violence.

As if the ideas and actions of the neo-Nazis, white supremacists, and anti-Semites who assembled in Charlottesville are not repugnant enough, equally repugnant are the views and actions of people who have failed to condemn these groups unequivocally for what they really are: anti-American and hostile to the nation's core values. Putting these hateful groups on the same moral plane as groups who turned out in Charlottesville to oppose bigotry is offensive and wrong. President Trump and his enablers who said that "many sides" shared blame for the events in Charlottesville lack the moral clarity to call bigotry what it is—and they lack a basic understanding of the ideals espoused in the nation's founding documents, subsequent amendments to the Constitution, and landmark laws, such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

The reactions of the president and these others who embrace his views reveal their ignorance of the nation's history and its persistent struggle to expand the blessings of liberty to all Americans regardless of their personal characteristics. Shame on those leaders and their enablers for failing the country during such a dire time. Fortunately, tens of millions of others know better and will continue to articulate, defend, and protect the country's core values even if the president and his allies refuse to do so.

The United States will pick itself up from the horrors of neo-Nazism, white supremacy, and anti-Semitism that were displayed in Charlottesville. The arc of the nation's history should reassure us that the forces for democracy, equality, and liberty will continue to grow and thrive due to the persistent efforts of people from all walks of life, races, and religious traditions. The United States may never become perfect, but it will continue to become more perfect as a result. I have no doubt about that.

