

‘Please don’t be too nice’: Trump tells cops it’s fine if suspects hit their heads

“Like when you guys put somebody in the car, and you’re protecting their head,” Trump said, “you can take the hand away, OK?” He made the remarks in an address to federal, state and local police officers on Friday.

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U.S. President Donald Trump advised police officers Friday to stop protecting the heads of arrested suspects they are putting in their cars.

“When you see these towns, and you see these thugs being thrown into the back of a paddy wagon — you just see ‘em thrown in, rough. I said, ‘Please don’t be too nice,’” Trump told a group of federal, state and local officers in Brentwood, N.Y., address focused on the MS-13 gang.

“Like when you guys put somebody in the car, and you’re protecting their head — the way you put the hand over — like, don’t hit their head, and they’ve just killed somebody, don’t hit their head? I said, ‘You can take the hand away, OK?’”

His remarks were greeted with a brief moment of silence, then laughter and applause.

Trump made “law and order” a centerpiece of his campaign, and he has long called for a merciless approach to crime that dispenses with “political correctness.” But he had never before as president given his blessing to the casual injuring of criminal suspects.

Seven minutes after that remark, he declared, “Under the Trump administration, America is once more a nation of laws.”

Trump was immediately condemned by human rights groups and civil liberties advocates.

“Police cannot treat every community like an invading army, and encouraging violence by police is irresponsible and reprehensible,” said Zeke Johnson, senior director of programs at Amnesty International USA.

“Causing intentional injury to a handcuffed suspect is not only against police procedure, but is a federal crime for which police officers have been sent to prison,” said Jonathan Blanks, managing editor of the National Police Misconduct Reporting Project at the libertarian Cato

Institute. In the name of law and order, Blanks said, “the president made a mockery of the rule of law.”

Trump also praised the acting director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Thomas Homan, for appearing “rough.” Just as he wanted a rich man as his commerce secretary, he said, he wanted a rough man as the head of the agency responsible for deporting illegal immigrants.

Trump has regularly criticized Chicago’s leaders for the city’s homicide problem, claiming it could be solved if officers there were allowed to be “much tougher.” On Friday, he told a story about an unnamed officer who supposedly declared the problem could be eradicated in “a couple days.”

Trump has followed his words with actions. His administration, led by Attorney General Jeff Sessions, has moved to reduce federal scrutiny of rights-abusing local police forces the Obama administration investigated and sought to reform.

Trump vowed to destroy MS-13, a multinational gang founded in Los Angeles, and to deport the members who are in the country illegally. He continued to describe MS-13 members as “animals,” discussing their murders in graphic terms: “They like to knife ’em and cut ’em and let ’em die slowly,” he said. He added: “Burned to death. Beaten to death. Just the worst kind of death. Stuffed in barrels.”

The speech was light on substance, and Trump repeatedly meandered into other subjects. Addressing Republicans’ failure early Friday morning to pass a Senate plan to replace Obamacare, he said, “They should’ve approved health-care last night, but you can’t have everything. Boy, oh boy.”

In another remarkable declaration, Trump said he now wants to “let Obamacare implode,” a move that would hurt the health-care of tens of millions of people.