Trump Blames NYC Attack On Diversity Visa Lottery Program

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November 1, 2017

President Donald Trump said Wednesday, one day after a deadly attack struck New York City, that he would push to eliminate the diversity visa lottery program "as soon as possible."

The suspect in Tuesday's attack, 29-year-old Sayfullo Habibullaevic Saipov, used the visa lottery program to legally emigrate from Uzbekistan in 2010, the Department of Homeland Security confirmed.

"I'm going to ask Congress to immediately initiate work to get rid of this program," Trump said in remarks at the White House. "'Diversity lottery' sounds nice. It's not nice. It's not good. It's not good. It hasn't been good."

The president said he would also push to end "chain migration," a phrase that immigration restrictionists use to describe allowing immigrants to sponsor their family members to join them in the U.S. Trump said Saipov sponsored others to immigrate to the country.

"We want people that are going to help our country," Trump said. "We want people that are going to keep our country safe. We don't want lotteries where the wrong people are in the lotteries."

"And guess what? Who are the suckers that get those people?" he added, seemingly referring to the U.S.
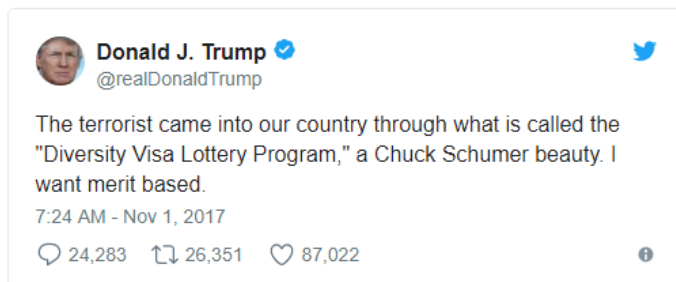
Trump called Saipov an "animal" and said he would consider sending him to Guantanamo Bay, a detention facility where alleged perpetrators of the 9/11 terrorist attacks have remained on trial for years.

Restrictionists have for years targeted the lottery, which provides legal pathways for people from countries with historically low immigration rates to the U.S., making it an ideal target for Trump. Established in 1990, the lottery provides only 50,000 visas annually, and applicants are required to have completed at least a high school education or at least two years of work experience. Visas are distributed among nationals from six different regions.

Trump is backing a bill that would end the diversity visa lottery program and cut other forms of family-based routes to come to the country legally, with the explicit goal of halving legal immigration.

Eliminating the lottery was also included on a lengthy list of policy demands that the president sent to Congress last month. Trump laid out the requests after eliminating a program that protects young undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. as children and saying he would sign a bill to let them stay in the country only if he was granted other policy concessions.

Trump has called for slashing legal immigration by moving to a "merit-based" system that would allow fewer people to come to the U.S. based on family ties or through the visa lottery. He did so again on Wednesday.

Donald J. Trump ✔
@realDonaldTrump

The terrorist came into our country through what is called the "Diversity Visa Lottery Program," a Chuck Schumer beauty. I want merit based.

7:24 AM - Nov 1, 2017

💬 24,283   🔁 26,351   ♡ 87,022

Donald J. Trump ✔
@realDonaldTrump

We are fighting hard for Merit Based immigration, no more Democrat Lottery Systems. We must get MUCH tougher (and smarter). @foxandfriends

7:30 AM - Nov 1, 2017

💬 12,750   🔁 17,253   ♡ 64,559

Trump called the lottery program a "Chuck Schumer beauty," piggybacking off of other right-wing attacks on the Democratic senator from New York, who was one of the people to introduce the bill. He also sponsored the larger immigration bill that ultimately passed.

Schumer shot back Wednesday, saying in a statement that Trump "should be focusing on the real solution — anti-terrorism funding — which he proposed cutting in his most recent budget."

Chuck Schumer ✔
@SenSchumer

I guess it's not too soon to politicize a tragedy.

8:37 AM - Nov 1, 2017

💬 3,893   🔁 14,416   ♡ 47,835

Schumer helped push for the creation of the diversity visa lottery, but he also co-authored a bill that would have ended it. In 2013, he was part of the so-called Gang of Eight who drafted a bill that would have granted a path to citizenship to many undocumented immigrants, dramatically ramped up border security efforts and overhauled legal immigration. The bill passed the Senate but never got a vote in the House.

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Sen. Jeff Flake (R-Ariz.), another member of the Gang of Eight, came to Schumer's defense on Wednesday by pointing out that the 2013 bill "did away with the Diversity Visa Program as part of broader reforms."

"I know, I was there," Flake tweeted.

Trump likely tagged "Fox & Friends" in one of his tweets because Sebastian Gorka, a former assistant to the president, appeared on the show Wednesday morning to discuss the visa program and advocate for its revision.

"The idea that we're just going to ― if you got a high school diploma and two years of work experience, we can roll the dice and can you come into America and it's not based upon whether or not you are [a] strength [to] the nation ― that has to end," Gorka said.
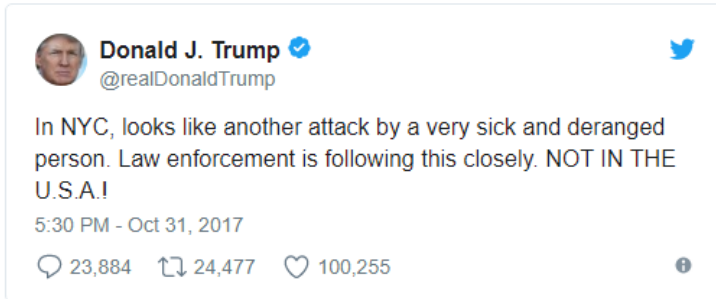
He mentioned countries like Australia and New Zealand, which he claimed have "incredibly stringent immigration requirements" based on education.

"No more political correctness," he continued. "Political correctness can kill people."

Advocates of lower immigration levels frequently cite Australia's merit-based system, but the country actually accepts far more immigrants as a percentage of its population than the U.S. does.

Although Senate Democrats agreed to eliminate the diversity visa lottery program as part of the 2013 comprehensive immigration reform bill, there is no consensus within the party. In 2013, the Congressional Black Caucus expressed concern about plans to do away with the visas, about half of which go to people from African nations.

The Uzbek population in the U.S. is relatively small, and a majority of new immigrants from the country came on diversity visas. Sixty-nine percent of Uzbek immigrants in 2010 were granted visas through the lottery, and only 2 percent came as refugees, according to analysis of government data by the Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank.

Tuesday afternoon, in the hours after the attack, Trump tweeted that it "looks like another attack by a very sick and deranged person." He then appeared to suggest the event may be linked to the militant group that calls itself the Islamic State, which has not yet been found to have any connection to the attack.

At least eight people were killed and 12 were injured after a man drove a Home Depot rental truck down a bike path on the West Side Highway, striking several people. The driver also rammed the truck into a school bus. Saipov, who was injured in the attack, was later taken into police custody.

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio called the incident an "act of terror."