

CNN News Central

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[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Fueling a Political Firestorm]

DANNY FREEMAN: Fueling a political firestorm. How a video of a deadly stabbing in Charlotte has turned into a flashpoint as the administration pushes its crime crackdown.

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2:10:26 p.m.

5 minutes and 34 seconds

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Developing Story; Trump Decries Killing of Ukrainian Refugee in Charlotte]

BRIANNA KEILAR: President Trump is also condemning a sickening crime that was captured on video and citing the senseless murder as another reason to get tough on crime. I do want to warn you, the video is disturbing and graphic. This is surveillance video from moments before a man stabbed a 23-year-old Ukrainian refugee to death aboard a light rail train in Charlotte, North Carolina, last month. She boards the train and sits in front of the suspect and after a few moments in a seemingly random act of violence, the suspect pulls out a knife and attacks her.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Developing Story; Trump Decries Killing of Ukrainian Refugee, Calls Stabbing Suspect a “Madman” and “Lunatic”]

PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: I just give my love and hope to the family of the young woman who was stabbed this morning or last night [sic] in Charlotte by a madman. A lunatic just got up and started. It’s right on the tape. Not — not really watchable because it’s so horrible, but just viciously stabbed. She’s just sitting there, So there are evil people. We have to be able to handle that. If we don’t handle that, we don’t have a country.

KEILAR: We’re joined now by Jon Miller, CNN’s chief law enforcement and intelligence analyst, and Brian Stelter, CNN’s chief media analyst. John, what do we know about this horrible attack? And also the alleged assailant here?

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Developing Story; Ukrainian Refugee Stabbed to Death on Charlotte Transit Train]

JOHN MILLER: Well, Brianna, it is, as the President described it, completely unprovoked. This is a 20 minute videotape where for most of it, everybody on the train is like many trains engaged in their phones, except the suspect, who seems to be restless, sitting by himself. And he rides for quite a while, at which point Iryna Kartuska comes on board. The train is sitting there, and he

suddenly gets up, unfolds the knife, stabs her in the neck, attacks her very violently, and you literally on the video can see, her almost die in front of your eyes. She goes unconscious very quickly and when you go into the background of this offender, he's got 14 arrests. He's just in a five year bit in prison for an armed robbery and he is someone who has a mental health history, who says to his family members who CNN's Jeff Winter spoke to on the phone today, spoke to his mother, who said, you know, he — he just got out of the hospital. He was receiving other treatment, but he is one of these offenders who clearly fell between the cracks in terms of the kind of treatment he was getting and this terrible, terrible crime.

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Developing Story; Suspect in Charlotte Stabbing Charged With First Degree Murder; Alleged killer has 14 previous court cases in Mecklenburg County, NC]

KEILAR: And this is an attack that has set off a political firestorm about crime in Democratic-led cities. Now to the highest level, as you heard, the President there, John, what can you tell us about the crime situation just broadly in Charlotte?

[ON-SCREEN HEADLINE: Developing Story; Trump Decries Killing of Ukrainian Refugee]

MILLER: I mean, Charlotte is a place with a very effective police department, very effective leadership. Murder is down 29 percent, aggravated assault down 25 percent. There's a property crime in terms of burglary, shoplifting, showing small increases, but basically, Charlotte has done, with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department, a pretty effective job on crime. The idea that this individual was coming out of jail, on parole after five years in prison for an armed robbery, and was involved in some kind of treatment, shows some degree of follow up. But one of the things we're seeing here with these cases involving people suffering from mental illness who have violent tendencies, is those are the programs that have been cut the most and where treatment is hard to come by and North Carolina literally ranks last among states in the U.S. for having the availability of that kind of mental health care.

KEILAR: Brian, I think what the President said kind of got to this. He was talking about something that had just happened. This actually happened last month. It only gained national news attention here in the past couple of days. Why is that?

BRIAN STELTER: Right, most murders in the U.S. never become national news. This one has garnered attention for a couple of reasons. Number one, first and foremost, the recent release of that gruesome video. Second, the energy from pro-Trump activists. They picked up on this video from local news and ran with it. It's a little bit like the times when civil rights groups have raised attention about police-involved shootings. In this case, it is Trump-aligned influencers who are posting up a storm about this case on social media. Really, over the weekend, Elon Musk, Charlie Kirk, other Trump aligned figures succeeded in making this senseless death a symbol of big city crime. We heard President Trump asked about it yesterday when he was heading home from New York City. He didn't seem to know much about it. He said he would get briefed and then today, Trump did know all about it. That's exactly what has happened here. This story has trickled up from so from local news to social media and now to the President's attention and it's being used, as you said, Brianna, as a political symbol with MAGA media calling for more

forceful punishments and more incarceration. I have to say, some of the replies to Musk, some of the comments around this story are baldly racist, stoking fear of African Americans because this man attacked a white woman. The open racism on sites like X today — it's eye popping, but there are also legitimate questions about this so-called career criminal. Someone who had been a repeat offender and those questions, I hope they're not lost amid all of the cesspool kind of comments on social media.

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KEILAR: Yeah. John Miller, Brian Stelter, thank you so much to both of you.