

CNN's *The Arena with Kasie Hunt*

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4:23:46 p.m.

45 seconds

SCOTT JENNINGS: I agree with Ted Cruz. I'm a free speech absolutist myself. I mean, obviously Attorney General Bondi laid out things that you cannot do. I mean, you cannot, sort of try to do some of the activities that she specifically listed. But generally speaking, Ted Cruz is right, and it is conservatives who have, I think, lately and most vociferously stood up for the rights of free speech in this country. And I think it's largely been on the left where you've had people trying to, I think, infringe upon free speech. It would be a mistake for us to, as conservatives, to abandon our strong defense of free speech. And so I'm glad — I'm glad what Ted Cruz said. I'm glad General Bondi also narrowed down the kinds of activities that she thinks run afoul of law, which I think ultimately she — she wound up in the right place.

(....)

4:25:59 p.m.

7 minutes and 48 seconds

KATE BEDINGFIELD: I think where it where it starts to get concerning is when you have figures from frankly, from President Trump on down who are using, trying to use this moment to suggest that there, you know, there is inherent violence on the left and that, you know, the government should be seeking out and rooting out these organizations when we have no indication that this shooter acted you know, at the behest of or through the organization of any of these groups. And I think when you start to bleed those two concepts together and create this notion that in this incredibly fraught moment, in the wake of this horrific, horrific shooting, when you foment the idea that we have to be at each other's throats politically, I think that's a risky I think that's a dangerous place to be.

JENNINGS: "Why did I do it? I had enough of his hatred. Some hate can't be negotiated out."

BEDINGFIELD: So — so — can I ask you —

JENNINGS: He — he has a flat —

HUNT: Scott, explain what you just read for the audience.

JENNINGS: — that is — that is the message that the shooter Tyler Robinson sent to his roommate. That is what he said. He also engraved the word, "hey, fascist catch" on the bullet. For ten years, we have heard nothing from the left but that Donald Trump is a fascist. Republicans are Nazis. Authoritarians destroy the Constitution. Bloodbath.

HUNT: But that's also —

BEDINGFIELD: So, can I ask you — no — no —

JENNINGS: Dictator for a day. And he wrote it on the bullet.

BEDINGFIELD: — so, can I ask you —

JENNINGS: And he's been obviously marinating in some kind of information that radicalized him based on what he heard in the air in this country.

BEDINGFIELD: — so, does the shooter who assassinated Melissa Hortman, who was a stated Trump supporter, whose roommate said he was a Trump supporter —

JENNINGS: Are you trying to equate the two?

BEDINGFIELD: — does he represent —

JENNINGS: I'm sorry.

BEDINGFIELD: — can you let me finish my thought, please?

JENNINGS: Please!

HUNT: We're talking about two people in politics who both —

BEDINGFIELD: Does — does —

HUNT: — who were — whose lives were taken.

BEDINGFIELD: — that shooter represents the entirety of the MAGA movement? Of course not. I would never argue that. I don't think you would argue that, so why is it acceptable to use this moment to argue that somebody, a sick individual who committed a horrific crime —

JENNINGS: How do you know he's sick?

BEDINGFIELD: — is somehow — are you here to argue for his sanity?

JENNINGS: I'm here to argue. All — all I know is what the — the prosecutor said today. He read very lucid messages from a shooter who was motivated by political hate, who had a plan to get away with it. He did not sound like a deranged person. He sounded like someone who had decided to take it upon himself to rid the world of someone that he hated politically, that he thought that the world would be better off without. That's different than some deranged —

LULA GARCIA-NAVARRO: Can I —

BEDINGFIELD: His — his actions were — his actions were —

JENNINGS: — lunatic showing up off the street.

BEDINGFIELD: — his actions were horrific, but to assign — to assign the specific, hateful, violent, awful actions of somebody on an individual on the right or an individual on the left —

JENNINGS: I don't know that you're right about what happened —

BEDINGFIELD: — to the entirety of the political conversation —

JENNINGS: — in Minnesota. I don't.

BEDINGFIELD: — is incredibly dangerous and irresponsible in this moment.

JENNINGS: I think it's dangerous and irresponsible for nobody to take responsibility for ten years of the use of the language, fascism, Nazis, authoritarian —

BEDINGFIELD: I have seen —

JENNINGS: — so on and so forth. It's on the bullet casing.

BEDINGFIELD: — I have seen nothing but Democrats in the wake of this murder, saying that it was awful.

JENNINGS: You've seen nothing?

BEDINGFIELD: I have seen them —

JENNINGS: Literally nothing?

BEDINGFIELD: — elected Democrats — I have seen them saying nothing. But it was horrific that they condemn it, that they are sorry for his family, that this is an awful moment in the country. I've seen President Trump do nothing but say it was the Democrats fault.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Can I — can I —

HUNT: Okay.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: — just jump in here for a second?

HUNT: Yes. Go ahead.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: I just want to read the words of someone who, I think, is very wise. In the wake of 2019 and the killing in El Paso, he wrote: "We have to stop blaming the politicians we loathe for the vile actions of the deranged, evil people who commit mass shootings." He went on to say: "But here's the thing. We should not" — "the rush to rage against Trump and the predictive punditry that he will inevitably fail to unite the country seems counterproductive to people who want a meaningful policy outcome. All politicians have a responsibility to ratchet

down their rhetoric and to ask their supporters to stand down as well.” And that man was Scott Jennings. And so, what I would say about that is those were wise words then, and they should be wise words now.

JENNINGS: I don’t —

BEDINGFIELD: Agree, agree!

JENNINGS: — I don’t disagree with any of that. What I am not happy about is that we have the shooter’s words. We know what he put on the bullets. It’s very, very, very clear —

HUNT: So, Scott —

JENNINGS: — what happened here —

HUNT: — can I —

JENNINGS: — and there is a movement by some people —

HUNT: — but — but is it, though?

JENNINGS: — to completely say, well, we have no idea.

HUNT: Hold on. Hold on, Scott.

JENNINGS: And we do.

HUNT: Hold on. I — I — I am — we are — we have the — you can the floor back, but here’s the thing. I had to really struggle to understand all of the details that were on those were on those bullets. They are internet memes from video games that people way younger than us play, okay? There is something going on online that is merging with the real world in really strange ways. And I’m just I’m interested to know if you have grappled with that. I’m not sure it fits quite neatly. We think about the world in a certain way, right? We came up in our politics in a certain way, and now kids, this kids age are stewing in something different.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: And you wrote something back then about a different shooter where they killed a bunch of Latinos and you very explicitly in that article for CNN said, I do not believe that we should take the actions of one sick individual who might have acted towards hate and extrapolate that more widely to President Trump. And so, I guess my question would be, why should that be different today?

JENNINGS: Look, I am only reacting to what I have seen and heard out here for the last eight years, which is nothing but Democrats and liberal pundits and supposed analysts assigning the word fascist to Republicans from Trump all the way down. I see a shooter who’s engraved it on a bullet. I have a shooter who sent a message to his roommate.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Scott, people —

JENNINGS: “Whatever. I’ve had enough of his hatred.” I’m only simply —

GARCIA-NAVARRO: — Scott —

JENNINGS: — suggesting that we stop —

GARCIA-NAVARRO: — I understand that you’re in pain.

JENNINGS: — looking at the evidence in the face and saying —

GARCIA-NAVARRO: I understand that you’re in pain.

JENNINGS: — ‘gee whiz, what happened here?’ We know.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: But language has been used —

JENNINGS: We know.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: — on all sides. I mean, the — the person who have — you know, the people who have called President Trump a Nazi was his present Vice President and his present secretary of — of — of — human —

HUNT: Health and Human Services.

GARCIA-NAVARRO: — health and human services. So, I mean, language is a problem. There’s no question. I think what everyone is reacting to here is the fear that the use of this is going to make it so that you are now targeting people who aren’t involved in this at all.

KRISTEN HOLMES: And I also think one other thing people are reacting to is the idea that I think everyone who saw or most people who saw what happened last week were horrified by those events, by watching this man get killed in broad daylight. And there was a lot of hope that this would be a moment, an actual turning point, moment of this is going to be all of these people calling for cooler temperatures and different rhetoric, and it just wasn’t. And I think that’s also what people are reacting to is that if not this, then is there anything at all that can happen? Watch a 31-year-old father get gunned down in front of his family and nobody changes their rhetoric.

HUNT: We — this has been a very strong conversation. And Scott Jennings, I — I want you to know that we take your point that the way that we talk matters very, very much —

GARCIA-NAVARRO: Indeed.

HUNT: — and that anything that leads to violence is absolutely unacceptable and I really appreciate having your perspective.

(....)

4:50:37 p.m.

5 minutes and 2 seconds

GOVERNOR JOSH SHAPIRO (D-PA): During moments like this, I believe we have a responsibility to be clear and unequivocal in calling out all forms of political violence and making clear it is all wrong. That shouldn't be hard to do.

HUNT: The Pennsylvania governor, Josh Shapiro, today emerging as probably the most high-profile Democrat to make a public address condemning political violence in the wake of Charlie Kirk's assassination. Shapiro, who is widely considered a likely 2028 presidential candidate, knows personally what it is like to be targeted for what you believe in. This past spring, his house was set on fire in the middle of the night as his family slept by a man who says he intended to beat the governor with a hammer. Shapiro warning that if leaders don't condemn each and every act of political violence, we are setting down a very dangerous road unfortunately, some from the dark corners of the internet all the way to the Oval Office.

SHAPIRO: Unfortunately, some in the dark corners of the internet, all the way to the Oval Office, want to cherry pick which instances of political violence they want to condemn. Listen, doing that only further divides us, and it makes it harder to heal. There are some who will hear that selective condemnation and take it as a permission slip to commit more violence.

HUNT: All right. Our panel is back, and, Scott Jennings, I will note that the governor of Pennsylvania, Josh Shapiro, was someone who, when President Trump, somebody you know, was hit by a bullet in Butler, Pennsylvania, Shapiro stood up and denounced it in a clear, unequivocal way. Now he's saying we do the same thing here. Do you think that he has got a point?

JENNINGS: Well, I think his point would be strengthened if he were honest today about who burned his house down. You know, it was a Free Palestine leftist who came and burned down the governor's mansion. He left that out. He left that out of his tweet today and he's talking about cherry picking political violence. And we're talking about where there might be political violence. The violence against the governor of Pennsylvania and his family came from the left. And so, I — I think — look, I think there's a rush by Democrats who want to be president in 2028 to try to turn — somehow Donald Trump's friend get shot and now everybody wants to blame Donald Trump for it. I guess that's what you have to do to get elected president as a Democrat.

HUNT: We are not doing that sitting here. Okay? And Kate, please, go ahead.

JENNINGS: I'm sorry. Is that — is that not what's happening? People are point —

BEDINGFIELD: I think the governor's point is that it doesn't matter where the violence came from —

JENNINGS: I think — I think it might.

BEDINGFIELD: — and should be condemned.

JENNINGS: Should — shouldn't it matter the motivations of the people?

BEDINGFIELD: It should be condemned regardless is the entire point of his speech.

JENNINGS: Agreed. Don't you care about the motivations?

BEDINGFIELD: To sit here and suggest that somehow him not mentioning it was some sort of sleight of hand —

JENNINGS: Of course it is.

BEDINGFIELD: — to try to make it seem like it was someone else —

JENNINGS: I don't think his political party would accept this.

BEDINGFIELD: The entire point of what he was saying. And it's a message that's badly, badly needed in this country at this moment.

JENNINGS: Look, I think that if we cannot be honest, if I were him and somebody tried to burn my house down, I think I'd be honest about who did it and why they did it. And it would matter for people to know that, would it not?

HUNT: Scott, is this not a let's rise above? Because anyone that is committing an act of political violence, who is trying to kill someone else for what they believe in. It's, like, it is inherently wrong and awful. I mean, like —

JENNINGS: Why are your two impulses mutually exclusive? Why can't we all say all political violence is bad, which I wholeheartedly believe? And also be honest, when people have clear intentions? I think there's a difference between people that have clear intentions. And, you know, clearly deranged people. But in the case of Shapiro and I think in the case of Charlie Kirk, we know the intentions, the political intentions of the people at play and when we sort of skirt around it and we're not honest about it, we let it off the hook. And I don't think we should let people with clear political intentions to commit violence off the hook. And so, I like what he said about condemning violence. I just would like it a little more if we could just be a little bit honest about what happened at his house.

BEDINGFIELD: You would just like it if a politically critical message was applied to what he was trying to say. I mean, that's what you're saying, right? You're saying you like what he said in

condemning political violence across the board, but it didn't work for you because you didn't try to get in a dig at whose fault it was. The entire point is that we have to condemn political violence from — from all sides, in all stripes, in whatever form and I think the fact that we are sitting here, even having this conversation is deeply, deeply problematic in terms of where the where the temperature is in the country right now.

JENNINGS: I — I agree.

BEDINGFIELD: I think the fact that you would call him dishonest —

JENNINGS: I agree that it is problematic that a prominent Democrat cannot be honest about who tried to burn his house down. I totally agree with you about that.

BEDINGFIELD: Cannot be honest. As if did he misrepresent it?

JENNINGS: He didn't mention it and has refused to say it.

BEDINGFIELD: I think the only person misrepresenting what he said today, Scott Jennings, is, you.

JENNINGS: No, I'm reading what he tweeted. I listened to his speech. I'm not misrepresenting anything. I'm just saying that, you know, unless we say it out loud, how will people know?