



Written by [Veronika Kyrylenko](#) on January 28, 2026

## “You Can’t Have Guns”: Trump Deepens Second Amendment Rift After Minneapolis Shooting

President Donald Trump sharply altered the public narrative on Tuesday, saying that Alex Pretti, the man shot and killed by federal agents in Minneapolis, “shouldn’t have been carrying a gun.” Earlier that day, when asked about the shootings, he said, “You can’t walk in with guns. You just can’t.” The comments marked a departure from earlier administration rhetoric that focused on Pretti’s alleged criminal intent and supposed confrontations with law enforcement. The administration faced fierce reaction from gun-rights advocates and both Republican and Democratic lawmakers who argue the stance conflicts with both Second and First Amendment protections.



AP Images

### Trump’s Remarks

On Tuesday afternoon, President Trump [faced reporters](#) on the South Lawn of the White House.

One asked if Trump believed Alex Pretti was “acting as an assassin in Minneapolis.” The question was a reference to the description of Pretti by White House Deputy Chief of Staff Stephen Miller, who [branded Pretti](#) a “would-be assassin [who] tried to murder federal law enforcement.”

After clarifying whom the reporter was asking about, Trump said, “No.” He then added:

With that being said, you know, you can’t have guns. You can’t walk in with guns. You just can’t.

Asked how that squares with the Second Amendment, Trump doubled down:

Look, you can’t walk in with guns, you can’t do that. But it’s just a very unfortunate incident.

Later, at a separate event in Iowa, he [reiterated](#) that sentiment. The president made clear he disapproved of Pretti’s lawful firearm possession in that context:

Certainly, he shouldn’t have been carrying a gun.

After yet again stressing how “unfortunate” the killing was, he proceeded with the anti-gun rhetoric:

I don’t like that he had a gun. I don’t like that he had two fully loaded magazines. That’s a lot of bad stuff.



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The repetition left little ambiguity. The issue, in Trump's telling, was not just what Pretti did or intended to do. It was that he was armed at all.

## DHS and FBI

In the immediate aftermath of the shooting on Saturday, top Trump administration officials sought to justify the use of force in part by stressing the presence of a firearm.

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Kristi Noem [said](#):

I don't know of any peaceful protester that shows up with a gun and ammunition rather than a sign. This is a violent riot when you have someone showing up with weapons and are using them to assault law-enforcement officers.

Only Pretti did not assault anyone, and Noem's framing was widely seen as deflecting responsibility for the government's use of force. DHS's claims were challenged by, among many others, former Congressman Ron Paul and the Ron Paul Institute's Daniel McAdams, who accused the administration of "[blatantly lying](#)" about the killing. Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky likewise [rejected](#) the DHS narrative.

Speaking with Maria Bartiromo on Fox News on Sunday, FBI Director Kash Patel [echoed Noem](#):

You cannot bring a firearm, loaded, with multiple magazines, to any sort of protest that you want. It's that simple.

He [added](#):

No one who wants to be peaceful shows up at a protest with a firearm that is loaded with two full magazines.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt also [suggested](#) Pretti's handling of his gun put him in danger:

When you are bearing arms and you are confronted by law enforcement, you are raising ... the risk of force being used against you.

Those initial talking points aimed to justify the shooting by focusing on perceived threat rather than legal rights. But they quickly drew blowback from legal experts and gun-rights advocates who pointed out that [Minnesota law](#) does not prohibit armed individuals from attending protests.

The disconnect between federal officials' claims and state law widened the legal and political debate.

## Gun Groups React

Gun-rights organizations, already frustrated with the administration's rhetoric, quickly pushed back against Trump's remarks.

Dudley Brown, president of the National Association for Gun Rights, [told CNN](#) that Trump's comments were "clearly mistaken" and "wrong." Per the outlet:



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“I reached out to a great number of people in the administration at a very high level. And I only sent them three letters: W.T.F.,” Brown said of the administration officials’ comments in recent days. “And then this happens.”

“He argued it can actually be a ‘moral duty’ to be armed at a protest,” added the outlet.

Gun Owners of America also objected to the administration’s tone and implications:

“You absolutely may walk around with guns, and you absolutely may peacefully protest while armed,” the group’s senior vice president, Erich Pratt, told CNN. “We have the First and Second amendments to protect the right to protest while armed — an American historical tradition that dates back to the Boston Tea Party.”

The National Rifle Association (NRA), the largest and most established gun-rights group, also weighed in. Following Trump’s comments, the NRA [posted on X](#):

The NRA unequivocally believes that all law-abiding citizens have a right to keep and bear arms anywhere they have a legal right to be.

And over the weekend, the NRA [stated](#):

Responsible public voices should be awaiting a full investigation, not making generalizations and demonizing law-abiding citizens.

That was a response to a post of Bill Essayli, a U.S. attorney in California, which said that “If you approach law enforcement with a gun, there is a high likelihood they will be legally justified in shooting you.”

## Constitutional Limits

While the forceful response to the shooting “[created unusual alliances](#)” on Capitol Hill, social media quickly filled with commentary from Trump-aligned voices who framed the Minneapolis shooting as the result of Alex Pretti’s choices, not government action. Commentator Megyn Kelly [summarized](#) the sentiment:

You know why I wasn’t shot by Border Patrol this weekend? Because I kept my a\*\* inside and out of their operations.

That view treats proximity to federal agents as an assumption of risk and shifts responsibility away from the state. To be sure, assaulting, resisting, or impeding a federal officer engaged in official duties is a felony under [18 U.S.C. § 111](#). Related statutes criminalize interference with federal operations. But those laws address *conduct* — not mere presence, not lawful protest or observation, and not the legal carrying of a firearm under state or federal law. A number of prominent Republicans [expressed](#) the belief that constitutional limits still apply, even during tense law-enforcement operations. For example, Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky [wrote](#):



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Carrying a firearm is not a death sentence, it's a Constitutionally protected God-given right.

At the same time, critics argue that focusing on the firearms alone sidesteps the central issue — whether deadly force was justified — and risks turning constitutional rights into conditional privileges. The Fifth Amendment protects against deprivation of life without due process. The First and Second Amendments protect speech, assembly, and the right to bear arms. None contains a protest-site exception.

One can support enforcement of immigration laws and still demand that the government respect constitutional rights and bear responsibility for violations. Trump's remarks brought that tension into the open, shifting the debate from alleged intent to the scope of constitutional rights themselves — and whether they hold in real-life situations when the federal government finds them inconvenient.

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