

President Trump: 'North Korea Is a Brutal Regime, But We'll Handle It'

During his opening remarks Monday evening at a roundtable discussion with the American Technology Council, President Donald Trump took a moment to personally respond to the tragic news of Otto Warmbier's passing.

"Otto Warmbier has just passed away," he said. "He spent a year and a half in North Korea. A lot of bad things happened.

"But at least we got him home to be with his parents, where they were so happy to see him, even though he was in very tough condition. But he just passed away a little while ago.

"It's a brutal regime, and we'll be able to handle it."

The president didn't elaborate on what he meant by "handle it." The death of an American citizen at the hands of a foreign power usually doesn't sit well with any American president, but how Warmbier died has many Americans furious with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un at the moment.

Several members of Congress have called it murder and are demanding the North Korean regime be "held accountable."

Shortly after the news of the former University of Virginia student's passing broke, the White House issued the following statement:

Melania and I offer our deepest condolences to the family of Otto Warmbier on his untimely passing. There is nothing more tragic for a parent than to lose a child in the prime of life. Our thoughts and prayers are with Otto's family and friends, and all who loved him.

Otto's fate deepens my administration's determination to prevent such tragedies from befalling innocent people at the hands of regimes that do not respect the rule of law or basic human decency. The United States once again condemns the brutality of the North Korean regime as we mourn its latest victim.

Warmbier, who was Jewish, was one of 11 students who took part in a five-day New Year's vacation tour of North Korea offered by a Chinese company in January of 2016. As he was attempting to board a flight back to the U.S., he was singled out by North Korean officials and arrested for allegedly stealing a propaganda poster.

It's likely the charges were trumped up by the North Koreans in retaliation for new sanctions against the Kim regime's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. Danny Gratton, who was Warmbier's roommate during the trip, ended his silence upon the young man's return to the U.S. in an interview with *The Washington Post's* Josh Rogin.

"No words were spoken. Two guards just come over and simply tapped Otto on the shoulder and led him away, he said. "I just said kind of quite nervously, 'Well, that's the last we'll see of you.' There's a great irony in those words.

"That was it. That was the last physical time I saw Otto, ever. I was also the only person to see Otto taken away. Otto didn't resist. He didn't look scared. He sort of half-smiled."

After nearly two months in North Korean custody, he admitted to the "hostile act against the state" and was sentenced to prison. According to his family, he was tortured and suffered a neurological trauma that left him in a coma for nearly his entire time in captivity.

Last week, the Trump administration succeeded where the Obama administration had failed and secured the return of Warmbier to the U.S. He was brought to the University of Cincinnati

Medical Center, where despite the best possible care, his family says his death was inevitable. {eo}