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Obama Urges GOP Lawmakers to Abandon Trump as 'Unfit'

By DAN MCCUE

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(CN) - President Barack Obama on Tuesday offered his strongest denunciation to date of the Republican nominee Donald Trump, and urged Republican lawmakers to abandon their support for the GOP's controversial candidate.

In a news conference at the White House with Singapore's prime minister, Obama reiterated comments he made last week at the Democratic National Convention, saying Trump is "unfit to serve as president."

"The notion that he would attack a Gold Star family that had made such extraordinary sacrifices on behalf of our country, the fact that he doesn't appear to have basic knowledge around critical issues in Europe, in the Middle East, in Asia, means that he's woefully unprepared to do this job," the president said.

"And this is not just my opinion," Obama continued, "I think what's been interesting is the repeated denunciations of his statements by leading Republicans, including the Speaker of the House and the Senate Majority Leader, and prominent Republicans like Sen. John McCain."

The president then went on to urge the GOP leadership to withdraw their backing for Trump's candidacy.

"The question I think that they have to ask themselves is, if you are repeatedly having to say in very strong terms that what he has said is unacceptable, why are you still endorsing him?," he said. "What does this say about your party that this is your standard bearer?"

Obama said Trump's controversial remarks are not merely "an episodic gaffe ... This is daily, and weekly, where they are distancing themselves from statements he's making. There has to be a point in which you say, this is not somebody I can support for President of the United States, even if he purports to be a member of my party."

According to the president to do anything less make Republican criticisms of Trump "in the wake of his attacks on the Muslim parents of an American soldier, Humayun Khan, who died in Iraq, "ring hollow."

"The question they have to ask themselves is: If you are repeatedly having to say in very strong terms that what he has said is unacceptable, why are you still endorsing him?" Obama said. "What does this say about your party that this is your standard-bearer?"

The president said he doesn't doubt the sincerity of Republicans who have criticized Trump in recent days, "I don't doubt that they were outraged about some of the statements that Mr. Trump and his supporters made about the Khan family."

"But there has to come a point at which you say somebody who makes those kinds of statements doesn't have the judgment, the temperament, the understanding to occupy the most powerful position in the world," he said.

"People depend on the White House getting stuff right, and this is different than just having policy disagreements. I recognize that they all profoundly disagree with myself or Hillary Clinton on tax policy or on certain elements of foreign policy. But there have been Republican Presidents with whom I disagreed with, but I didn't have a doubt that they could function as President," Obama said. "I think I was right, and Mitt Romney and John McCain were wrong on certain policy issues, but I never thought that they couldn't do the job. And had they won, I would have been disappointed, but I would have said to all Americans they are -- this is our President, and I know they're going to abide by certain norms and rules and common sense, will observe basic decency, will have enough knowledge about economic policy and foreign policy and our constitutional traditions and rule of law that our government will work, and then we'll compete four years from now to try to win an election.

"But that's not the situation here," Obama said. "There has to come a point at which you say, enough. And the alternative is that the entire party, the Republican Party, effectively endorses and validates the positions that are being articulated by Mr. Trump. And as I said in my speech last week, I don't think that actually represents the views of a whole lot of Republicans out there."

In a statement released by the Trump campaign Tuesday afternoon, the candidate responded to Obama's comments by attacking what he called the president's "failed leadership."

"Obama-Clinton have single-handedly destabilized the Middle East, handed Iraq, Libya and Syria to ISIS, and allowed our personnel to be slaughtered at Benghazi," Trump said. "Then they put Iran on the path to nuclear weapons. Then they allowed dozens of veterans to die waiting for medical care that never came. Hillary Clinton put the whole country at risk with her illegal email server, deleted evidence of her crime, and lied repeatedly about her conduct which endangered us all."

The fusillade continued: "They released criminal aliens into our country who killed one innocent American after another -- like Sarah Root and Kate Steinle -- and have repeatedly admitted migrants later implicated in terrorism. They have produced the worst recovery since the Great Depression. They have shipped millions of our best jobs overseas to appease their global special interests. They have betrayed our security and our workers, and Hillary Clinton has proven herself unfit to serve in any government office."

The Clinton campaign also released a statement Tuesday afternoon, saying "Donald Trump's callous disregard for the Gold Star Khan family and the sacrifice they and their son have made for our country ... have shown once again that he is unfit and unqualified to be President.

"While Donald Trump seems singularly focused on tearing our country apart with his divisive rhetoric, the response in states around the country from veterans, military families, and editorial boards have been unequivocal: We are stronger together," the statement said.

Almost on cue, U.S. Rep. Richard Hanna, a three-term Republican who is not seeking re-election this year, announced he will vote for Hillary Clinton for president because he too believes Trump is "unfit to serve and party and cannot lead this country."

Other GOP members of Congress have refused to endorse Donald Trump's bid for the presidency, but Hanna is the first congressional Republican to publicly declare he will vote for Clinton in November.

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