

Trump to Speak Friday at NRA Annual Meeting

KAYLA GOGGIN

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ATLANTA (CN) — President Donald Trump will address the National Rifle Association convention in Atlanta on Friday, a rare appearance by a sitting president that underscores the significant role the gun rights group played in his election.

Over 80,000 people are expected to attend the National Rifle Association's 146th annual meeting in downtown Atlanta's Georgia World Congress Center Thursday through Sunday. And while the event features a 10-acre

exhibition of firearms and hunting gear, the main attraction is Friday's Leadership Forum, where President Donald Trump will deliver a keynote address.

The president is expected to speak shortly after noon on Friday. Other scheduled speakers include Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, Florida Gov. Rick Scott, Georgia Sen. David Perdue, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke, and NRA Executive Vice President and CEO Wayne LaPierre.

President Trump is the first sitting president since Ronald Reagan to speak at an NRA convention — a milestone that is surely not a coincidence given the president's strong financial ties to the organization. During Trump's campaign for president, the NRA spent more than three times as much money to generate support for him than it spent during Mitt Romney's campaign in 2012. The organization spent \$4.8 million on ad spots during the 2012 election cycle compared to \$16.1 million in 2016.

Overall, the NRA spent [\\$30.3 million](#) to help get Trump elected.

During his campaign, Trump promised to "save the second amendment." He has repeatedly identified himself as an opponent of gun control and has specifically stated that he does not support a ban on assault weapons. Now, the NRA appears hopeful that the president will help push through legislation that would further reduce the federal restrictions on firearms. Donald Trump Jr., the president's oldest son, recently put his support behind a bill—cunningly named "the Hearing Protection Act"—that would reduce wait times for gun silencers and make them easier to purchase. Understandably, Trump's Friday morning appearance has driven significant excitement for the annual convention. Janice and Richard Amadeo, 20-year NRA members from the suburbs of Chicago, plan on attending Friday's event to applaud the president's pro-gun stance. "I'm just excited to have a president that actually supports the second amendment," Janice said.

But not everyone flocking to the Georgia World Congress Center on Friday is doing so out of a sense of gratitude.

Multiple protest groups are planning demonstrations to coincide with the president's speech. A group called "Resist Trump" is planning a "die-in" protest at Woodruff Park (roughly one mile away from the convention center) and another group called "Georgians for the Impeachment of

Donald Trump” is hosting an “Impeach Trump Rally” in nearby Valdosta, Georgia.

Notably, The Betsy Riot, an anti-NRA pro-feminist group, is planning a “ground and air assault” in downtown Atlanta which will feature an aerial banner emblazoned with the slogan “NRA = Murder Lobby.”

“Donald Trump took millions from the NRA during his campaign, and the gun lobby death merchants are eager to collect their pound of flesh by weakening existing gun regulations and pursuing their guns-everywhere agenda,” a spokeswoman for The Betsy Riot said in a statement. “We are protesting this murder fantasy convention with mockery and anger,” the statement continued.

Convention attendees appear to be taking the planned protests in stride. Stone Harrington, an NRA firearms instructor from Atlanta, said, “It’s freedom of speech. It’s a good thing. The right to bear arms is controversial and how people interpret it certainly is. As long as we can feel safe and comfortable in our surroundings, it’s okay.”

Visitors to the convention are allowed to bring their guns along with them. However, no firearms will be allowed inside the area where President Trump will speak.