



## Vance's team was told Haitian immigrant rumors were false before debate, Springfield mayor confirms

By Elizabeth Wolfe, [Melissa Alonso](#), [Jeff Winter](#) and Chelsea Bailey, CNN

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Trump & Vance defy pleas to stop repeating false pet rumors

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**(CNN)** — The Trump campaign continued to push false claims about Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, even after a top city leader told a campaign staffer for its vice presidential nominee ahead of this month's presidential debate the rumors were "baseless," the city's mayor said, confirming a Wall Street Journal report.

A staffer of vice presidential candidate JD Vance called Springfield City Manager Bryan Heck on September 9 and asked if there was any truth in rumors that Haitian immigrants were taking and eating pets in Springfield, Heck told the Journal.

"He asked point-blank, 'Are the rumors true of pets being taken and eaten?'" Heck told the outlet. "I told him no. There was no verifiable evidence or reports to show this was true. I told them these claims were baseless."

"Yes, that call was made," Springfield Mayor Rob Rue told CNN's "Laura Coates Live" Thursday. "The answer was given, and what has happened since then has happened."



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CNN has made repeated attempts to reach Heck for comment.



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During the debate the day after the city official discredited the rumor, former President Donald Trump parroted the false claim that Haitian immigrants in Springfield are stealing and eating local pets, casting the Midwestern community into an unwelcome national spotlight that has stoked threats of violence against its residents.

Since the September 10 debate, Springfield has received more than 35 threats of violence, including bomb threats, according to the mayor, which has prompted evacuations of elementary schools and supermarkets, lockdowns of hospitals, and a transition to remote learning at several local colleges.

“The Springfield I know is not the one you hear about in social media rumors,” Ohio Republican Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, who was born in the city, wrote in an op-ed for The New York Times Friday.

“It is disappointing to me that Springfield has become the epicenter of vitriol over America’s immigration policy, because it has long been a community of great diversity,” DeWine wrote

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“As a supporter of former President Donald Trump and Senator JD Vance, I am saddened by how they and others continue to repeat claims that lack evidence and disparage the legal migrants living in Springfield. This rhetoric hurts the city and its people, and it hurts those who have spent their lives there,” the op-ed said.

Two colleges in Springfield, Clark State College and Wittenberg University, announced Friday they will resume in-person learning Monday after classes went remote as law enforcement investigated both campuses for threats of bombings and campus shootings.

Both institutions said enhanced security measures will be in place. At Wittenberg University, that includes limited entry to all buildings, increased security measures and additional video surveillance cameras. At Clark State College, there will be a bolstered police presence and ongoing threat assessments, among other measures, the release said.



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“To date, none of the scores of threats made toward multiple entities in Springfield have proved credible,” said Wittenberg University.

## The ‘Sassy’ cat that started it all is alive and well



Miss Sassy is seen on Friday, September 20, in Springfield, Ohio. Jeff

Winter/CNN

Miss Sassy, the cat whose sudden disappearance in August jumpstarted the rumor mill about Haitian migrants in Springfield, was found lounging Friday morning – alive and well – in a camping chair.

The cat's owner, Anna Kilgore, was not available for an interview, but CNN received permission to photograph Miss Sassy.

An emotional Kilgore told The Wall Street Journal earlier this week she has apologized to her Haitian neighbors for filing a police report that insinuated they had a role in her pet's brief disappearance.

Kilgore said the cat was discovered in her basement just a few days after she went missing.

Although the false claims about Haitian immigrants abusing animals have been widely discredited, Trump and Vance have doubled down since the debate.

Asked Sunday by CNN's Dana Bash to back up his claims, Vance, a US senator from Ohio, said he has received concerns from constituents, though he did not provide evidence.



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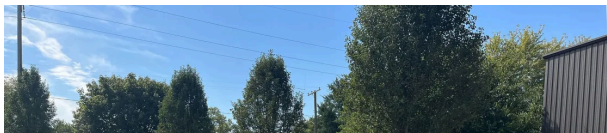
Troopers to patrol schools in Springfield, Ohio, after threats linked to false claims about Haitian

“My constituents have brought approximately a dozen separate concerns to me. Ten of them are verifiable and confirmable, and a couple of them I talk about because my constituents are telling me firsthand that they’re seeing these things. So I have two options, Dana: I can ignore them, which is what the American media has done for years to this community, or I can actually talk about what people are telling me,” Vance said.

A spokesperson for Vance, in response to CNN’s request for comment on the Journal report, accused the media of “purposely twisting Senator Vance’s words.”

The false claims and ensuing threats have sent Springfield into a state of chaos, with Rue on Thursday issuing a proclamation granting himself temporary emergency powers to obtain and mobilize resources and address potential threats.

“This will enable departments to respond more efficiently to emerging risks, including civil unrest, cyber threats, and potential acts of violence,” the proclamation said.





Two Ohio state trooper vehicles parked outside the Springfield City Schools office Friday. A staffer told CNN having the troopers stand guard was abnormal. Jeff Winter/CNN

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It comes as members of Springfield's Haitian community, many among the estimated 12,000 to 15,000 immigrants living in the city, have expressed fear for their safety.

Haitian immigrant Vilbrun Dorsainvil told CNN that since last week, people who used to walk along the sidewalks in his predominantly Haitian neighborhood are now scared to leave their homes.

As the city has struggled to respond to the slew of threats, Trump said at a campaign rally Wednesday night he would visit Springfield "in the next two weeks."

But Rue has repeatedly said a visit from either presidential candidate would stretch the city's resources.

"Should (Trump) choose to change his plans, it would convey a significant message of peace to the city of Springfield," Rue said during a news conference Thursday. "We've asked

many times that those with the national spotlight with a national microphone would speak truth. And we need help and not hate.”



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The mayor told CNN on Friday he also has concerns about the message candidates would send from Springfield.

“My concern is, what we’ve seen on the national stage, I really wouldn’t want that repeated ... in our community,” Rue said of a possible visit by Trump.

Ohio Rep. Warren Davidson told CNN he believes many in Springfield would welcome a visit from the Republican presidential candidate or his running mate.

“People want to know that they’re being heard,” Davidson said. “I think the part that’s being dismissed is there really are serious concerns.”

Rue also lamented how the false claims and frenzied public debate have distracted from deeper conversations about immigration reform. He said even if Trump or Vance were to recant their false statements about Haitian immigrants in the city, he’s not sure if it would make a difference.

“I don’t know what that would do. Like I said, the real issue is

what's being said around the rhetoric – is the immigration reform, is the porous border,” Rue said. “There needs to be reform ... That's what we need to be talking about. Not defending our community from false claims.”

*CNN's Jeff Winter, Meridith Edwards and Omar Jimenez contributed to this report.*

