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Speakers

Speaker(s): Patrick J. Toomey; John Boozman

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Mr. TOOMEY. Mr. President, last month I was here on the Senate floor

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to address the topic of the riots in Baltimore and the unfortunate and completely misguided scapegoating of police officers that has been going on far too often in parts of our country today. So I rise again today on the same topic because in just the last month or so there have been some more very harmful developments in this area.

One of those developments is the dramatic decline in police arrests and a massive increase in violent crime and murders in the city of Baltimore. Now, some of my friends would say: Why is the Senator from Pennsylvania speaking out so often about these tragic circumstances that are happening in Baltimore? Well, first of all, as a U.S. Senator, I am concerned with what goes on in our entire country, not just my State. Baltimore is a great American city that is going through a very difficult period, and we should all be concerned about it. Second of all, Baltimore is, of course, less than 100 miles away from Pennsylvania. Most importantly, what is happening in Baltimore is not happening only in Baltimore. The scapegoating of police and the rise of violent crime is happening in New York City and in other places as well. And, frankly, it is a threat to public safety and security in every city.

Some, including the police chief of St. Louis, MO, have described what has come to be known as the Ferguson effect. This can be traced back to the riots and lawlessness that followed the unfortunate death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, MO, last August. As you will remember, in the Ferguson case, Officer Darren Wilson acted in self-defense and shot and killed Brown when Brown attacked him while he was resisting arrest. In the weeks and months that followed the incident, and after Officer Wilson was cleared of wrongdoing, violent protests erupted. Protesters, police, and bystanders were injured. Buildings were burned to the ground. Property was destroyed. But instead of placing the onus on those who were actually causing the havoc, it was portrayed by many as if law

enforcement was somehow responsible for the violence and unrest. Anti-law enforcement sentiments were even expressed by some of the local officials in Ferguson. This endorsement of violent protesters empowered those who wished to turn peaceful protests into violent riots, and it also left the police feeling powerless.

What has happened in Ferguson since is as tragic as it was predictable. The homicide rate in Ferguson increased 47 percent in the latter portion of 2014, and robberies in St. Louis County jumped by 82 percent. This really should be no surprise. This is what happens when a city puts these views of "police as the problem" into practice, such as when a city determines that police are the cause of the violence as opposed to the brave defense against it, when a city justifies lawlessness, stops law enforcement from doing its job, and allows law breakers to go unpunished. The results of those practices are that the innocent members of those very communities pay a horrible price.

These tragic circumstances are now playing out in the city of Baltimore. On April 18 of this year, many Baltimore residents began peaceful protests over the injury and eventual death of Mr. Freddie Gray while he was in police custody. As I mentioned in my speech about this last month, in my view, Freddie Gray's death absolutely calls out for justice and calls out for a thorough investigation, and the judicial process is now proceeding and playing out exactly as it should. But what has happened in Baltimore since then is not about Freddie Gray.

A week after the Baltimore protests began, on April 25, they turned violent. Over the next 5 days rioters damaged 200 businesses. They set fire to a newly constructed senior center, burned down a CVS drugstore and cut the fire hose of the firemen who were trying to put out the flames, and set fire to 144 cars. And 130 law enforcement officers were injured, many seriously. The chaos was so extreme that the city had to impose a curfew for 5 days and had to call in 3,000 National Guard troops.

Now with all that mayhem, how did the public officials of Baltimore respond? On the first day of the violence, the mayor held a press conference in which she legitimized the violence. She said: "We also gave those who wish to destroy space to do that as well."

Seriously, space to destroy? Destroying other people's property, setting buildings and cars ablaze, attacking police officers? These are not legitimate acts, and no mayor should be accommodating those kinds of acts with "space." In fact, they are criminal. They are harmful. These are exactly the kinds of activities that a mayor should be all about stopping and preventing. But that is not all.

Next the Baltimore police were given a stand-down order, and they were forbidden from arresting the looters and the rioters. Then officials announced that half of all those arrested for the destruction and violence would be released without charges. Mobs would gather around police when they tried to enforce the law. All this is a clear illustration of the impact that the Ferguson effect is having on Baltimore.

Lawbreakers are in control, and the city's residents are at the mercy of the lawbreakers. Law enforcement has been limited because of a lack of support from the community and the civic and the political leaders.

Baltimore has seen the disastrous effects of this policy. The riots began to subside on April 30 when six police officers were arrested in the death of Mr. Gray, but the violence has continued. The month of May that just passed was Baltimore's deadliest month in over 40 years. There were 43 homicides in the month of May alone. Shootings have more than doubled compared to May of the previous year. These murders have nothing to do with anger over the death of Freddie Gray; they have everything to do with public policy that disparages police and turns a blind eye on criminal activity. You see, in Baltimore in the month of May, arrests were nearly 70 percent lower than the same month last year.

Some attempt to portray this whole crisis in racial terms, but tragically all too often the victims of this surge in violent crime are innocent African Americans who live in cities in which the police are no longer permitted to do their jobs.

Consider the case of an 8-year-old boy police found shot in the head on Thursday, May 28 at 8:20 a.m. He was lying dead beside his mother, who had also been fatally shot in the head.

Take the case of 23-year-old Charles Dobbins, who was killed on Monday, May 25. Charles' cousin reports that Charles was killed in a robbery. Charles worked at BWI. He worked transporting handicapped people to and from the terminals. He loved kids. When he graduated from high school, he worked for Baltimore city schools as a bus aid assisting disabled children.

Consider the case of 4-year-old Jacele Johnson. She was in a car with her teenage cousin when someone opened fire on the car, seriously wounding them both.

These are not just statistics; these are real people who are now lost to us. Their lives matter. That 8-year-old boy and his mother, 23-year-old Charles Dobbins, a little 4-year-old girl, Jacele Johnson, and her cousin-their lives matter.

The Ferguson effect, unfortunately, is not the only phenomenon that is at work here. Unfortunately, our President seems to have bought into the notion that the police are the problem and the solution is to deny them valuable tools.

This last month, the President announced extensive restrictions on when local police may access lifesaving Federal surplus equipment. The gear we are talking about is almost all purely defensive. It is riot helmets, riot shields, armored personnel transport vehicles. This is surplus gear. The Federal Government has already paid for it but has decided it has no use for it. It has long been the practice that this surplus protective gear has been made available to local police forces.

Why is this administration making it harder to send this purely defensive gear-gear that would otherwise go unused-to insufficiently protected police officers across the country? Why would the administration do that? Well, they released a report telling us why. Here is what they said in their own report. According to this report by the administration, the Federal equipment "could significantly undermine community trust" and that this concern outweighs the interest in "addressing law enforcement needs (that could not otherwise be fulfilled)." President Obama likewise opined that Federal equipment "can sometimes give people

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a feeling like there's an occupying force" and "can send the wrong message."

So this is the concern that justified keeping lifesaving gear from police officers. So, according to the administration, the need to save police officers' lives in the line of duty is something that should be weighed against and, in fact, sacrificed to the desire to prevent distrust or discomfort on the part of others. How many police officers' lives are we going to sacrifice? One? Twenty? One-hundred? This is outrageous.

Each day across America, there are 780,000 law enforcement officers who put on a badge and uniform, and they answer the call of those in need no matter the danger. When others run away, they run to the problem. The rest of us in America rely on these law enforcement officers doing their job. The people who live in high-crime areas, often ethnic minorities living in high-poverty areas of our inner cities-these are the folks who most depend on those officers. When those officers are held back, we all pay a steep price, but the residents of those communities pay the steepest price.

I just hope we in the Federal Government will stop putting obstacles in the way of law enforcement and start supporting them. I hope we as a nation will stop scapegoating law enforcement and start thanking them. If we fail to reverse the Ferguson effect, what we will see is more violent crime and more suffering of our people.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BOOZMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

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