

Democrats' pretense of police reform through Congress collapses

Trévon Austin
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Bipartisan negotiations for the George Floyd Act, legislation Democrats claimed would enact police reform measures in the wake of Floyd's brutal murder by Minneapolis police, have collapsed, effectively killing the bill.

Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ), the lead Democratic negotiator, reportedly told Senator Tim Scott (R-SC), the lead Republican, that he was done negotiating Wednesday after Scott rejected a final offer from the Democrats.

The American ruling class felt compelled to promise police reform after the unprecedented wave of multiracial and multiethnic protests against police violence and racism that involved many hundreds of thousands of people across the US last year.

The US House of Representatives originally passed the "George Floyd Justice in Policing Act" in March by a party-line vote of 220–212. The bill would create national standards for police use of force, make it easier to charge officers who commit misconduct and drastically reduce qualified immunity—which shields officers from most brutality lawsuits.

The bill was only a priority for the Biden administration and the Democrats while the trial of former cop Derek Chauvin was under way in Minneapolis. Once Chauvin was convicted and the immediate threat of widespread popular unrest had passed, Biden stopped talking about the bill and the congressional leadership was happy to let Booker, Scott and California Representative Karen Bass engage in protracted backroom talks.

These talks were supposedly aimed at overcoming a likely filibuster in the Senate by cutting back on the already modest proposals to win the support of ten Senate Republicans. Bass, who initially sponsored the bill in the House, joined forces with Booker and Scott.

Within the same month, the trio announced significant "compromise" around the bill, further watering down its already minimal provisions.

But the talks dragged on with the two sides coming no closer to an agreement to secure passage of the bill. In May, Congress missed a deadline that President Biden had set for passage of the bill, the anniversary of George Floyd's death. With this week's developments, the Democrats now appear to have thrown in the towel.

"We did the best we could," Bass told reporters on Wednesday. She said the negotiations with Republicans had weakened the police reform bill to the point that the legislation would not have made a meaningful impact. The truth is that the bill, in any version, would not have made a significant dent in the never-ending wave of police killings.

"We accepted significant compromises, knowing that they would be a tough sell to our community, but still believing that we would be moving the needle forward on this issue," Bass said in a formal statement. "But every time, more was demanded to the point that there would be no progress made in the bill that we were left discussing."

It now appears, unsurprisingly, that Scott was simply the frontman for the Senate Republican leadership which sought to block passage of any bill, preferring to appeal to the fascistic pro-Trump wing of the party by depicting the bill as a Democratic effort to "defund the police."

The Democrats were not even able to secure a deal based on a Trump-era executive order that banned chokeholds and no-knock warrants, limited the transfer of military equipment to local law enforcement and created a database to document complaints against police officers.

President Joe Biden released a statement on the bill's

defeat. “I still hope to sign into law a comprehensive and meaningful police reform bill that honors the name and memory of George Floyd, because we need legislation to ensure lasting and meaningful change,” he said. “Regrettably, Senate Republicans rejected enacting modest reforms, which even the previous president had supported, while refusing to take action on key issues that many in law enforcement were willing to address.”

This might have been the first time that the name “George Floyd” passed Biden’s lips since Derek Chauvin was sentenced to a long prison term for his murder. In his long career in the Senate, before becoming Obama’s vice president and now president, Biden was always identified with a hardline law-and-order approach, backing heavy prison sentences for non-violent drug convictions and other measures that filled the prisons with working class men, particularly racial minorities.

After months without any progress, the Democrats’ promises for police reform have proven entirely empty. The Democrats never meant to restrain the American police state that murders more than 1,000 people a year on average. The outcome represents one more slap in the face to the families of those who’ve been brutalized and victimized by police.

The Democrats’ dishonest campaign only sought to grant them political cover while diverting attention from their own role in overseeing brutal police crackdowns in states and cities controlled by the Democratic Party. All the talk of police reform is a dead letter. Neither faction of the ruling class is interested in undermining the “bodies of armed men” that defend the property, profits and political domination of the corporate-financial elite.



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