

Senate Democrats overwhelmingly vote with Republicans to advance fascistic anti-immigrant bill

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In a highly significant vote on Thursday, the majority of Senate Democrats joined with their “Republican colleagues” to advance the “Laken Riley Act.” The bill is part of Trump’s fascistic plans to launch the “largest deportation operation” in history.

The legislation is a direct assault on the democratic rights of the entire working class. The act would require federal immigration police to detain immigrants—without access to bail—if they are convicted or simply accused of burglary, theft, larceny or any shoplifting-related offenses. Under the act, an undocumented child falsely arrested for shoplifting by a vindictive police officer would be subject to mandatory detention, likely at a remote “for-profit” prison facility that could be located hundreds of miles away from his family.

The police state measure would also greatly expand the power of state attorneys general to usurp federal immigration policy. The bill would allow state attorneys general to file suit against the US Attorney General and/or the Secretary of Homeland Security if they feel the federal government is not enforcing federal immigration law to their liking.

Fascistic state attorneys general, such as Ken Paxton of Texas, could file suit in right-wing state courts which could then strike down elements of federal immigration policy, allowing the arrest and deportation of immigrants. Furthermore, state attorneys general could bring lawsuits that would seek to impose bans on visas from entire countries, including those currently suffering from US-backed military operations or sanctions.

Every Republican senator present and 32 Democrats voted for the bill, including Democratic leader Charles

Schumer, Democratic Whip Richard Durbin and former presidential candidate Amy Klobuchar. Only 8 Democrats, along with “independent” Senator Bernie Sanders, voted against the legislation. The 84-9 tally was well above the 60-vote threshold to overcome a filibuster. This past Tuesday, the US House also passed a version of the bill in a bipartisan 264-159 vote with support from 48 Democrats, 11 more than when the bill was first brought to a vote last year. It is expected that the legislation will be among if not the first items Trump signs into law upon assuming the presidency in 10 days.

The bill is named after Laken Riley, a 22-year-old college student, who was tragically murdered while going for a morning jog at the University of Georgia last year. José Antonio Ibarra, an undocumented man from Venezuela, was found guilty in a bench trial last year of multiple felony charges, include malice murder in connection with Riley’s death.

Almost immediately after it was revealed last year that Ibarra was a prime suspect in Riley’s death, Trump seized on her death to further his anti-immigrant agenda, recounting lurid details of the murder throughout his presidential campaign. Weeks after her murder, Trump campaigned in Georgia and blamed President Joe Biden for “intentionally” releasing an “illegal alien criminal.” Trump accused Biden of having a “formal policy” that left “this monster ... free to kill.”

In scapegoating all immigrants for the crimes of a single person, Trump and the Republicans, with the support of the Democrats, are seeking to blame all of the problems of capitalist society—crime, income inequality, lack of affordable housing, low-paying

jobs—on immigrants and asylum seekers, many of whom are fleeing countries previously ravaged militarily or economically by US imperialism.

New Republican Majority Leader John Thune of North Dakota has not indicated when, or if, he will allow amendments on legislation. Several Democratic senators, including newly elected Arizona “progressive” Ruben Gallego and Pennsylvania’s John Fetterman, Democratic co-sponsors of the Republican legislation, have already indicated they would support the bill in its current form.

Speaking on Fox News on January 7, Fetterman said the bill was “really common sense.” Adopting Trump’s rhetoric, the Democrat added, “I’d like to remind everybody that we have hundreds and hundreds of thousands of migrants here illegally that have [been] convicted of crimes. Hey, I don’t know why, who wants to defend, to allow them to remain in our nation?”

In addition to co-sponsoring the measure, Fetterman, an outspoken supporter of Israel’s genocide in Gaza, revealed on Thursday that he will become the first Democratic senator to meet with Trump at Mar-a-Lago. Among the topics of discussion, Fetterman said that in addition to “the border, Israel, China is a significant issue. ... I’d like to find more where we can work together.”

The Pennsylvania Democrat also reiterated his support for Trump’s nominee for Secretary of State, Florida Senator Marco Rubio. “I decided to vote for him the day it was announced,” Fetterman said. “He is a solid choice—100 percent.”

Fetterman is a pacesetter for the entire Democratic Party, which is racing to the far right to seek an accommodation with Trump, in order to advance their shared agenda which, as Fetterman laid out, is centered on continuing the genocide in Gaza and preparing for war on China.

While the *World Socialist Web Site* warned before Fetterman was elected that he was rapidly repudiating his previously held “progressive” positions as part of his class role of conning workers and youth into supporting the Democratic Party, *Jacobin* and other pseudo-left elements were sowing illusions in his candidacy and with it, reforming the capitalist system.

“John Fetterman Is the Kind of Political Communicator the Left Needs,” Ben Burgis of

Jacobin wrote on July 15, 2022. “As a communicator, John Fetterman has the highly effective Bernie Sanders formula down pat...” Burgis gushed. Following his election, Branko Marcetic of *Jacobin* penned an article headlined, “Centrists Were Wrong: Left-Wing Candidates Won.”

“Just look at Pennsylvania,” wrote Marcetic. “While victorious Democratic Senate candidate John Fetterman moved to the center on some issues, he ran on a broadly progressive platform...”

In a November 11, 2022 article posted on *Jacobin* and written by Krystal Ball, co-host of *Breaking Points*, Ball claimed, “Fetterman was the furthest left of any of the competitive Senate candidates.”

Democratic support for the bill was not unexpected. During his presidency, Joe Biden has deported more immigrants than Trump, and the Democratic presidential candidate last year, Vice President Kamala Harris, campaigned on a claim to be more effective in prosecuting the war on immigrants than Trump.

The Democrats’ embrace of Trump’s anti-immigrant agenda underscores that the defense of democratic rights will not come from any section of the pro-corporate political elite but only from an independent movement of the working class that unites all workers and their families, regardless of immigration status, against both parties and the capitalist system they defend.



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