

STATEMENT
OF
CHRISTOPHER JAMES DAVID
BEFORE THE
DEMOCRATIC ROUNDTABLE

AUGUST 4, 2020

Congressman Raskin and democratic members, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss my experience in the ongoing protests in Portland, Oregon. My name is Chris David. What I witnessed when I attended the protests was a shocking attack by our own government on peaceful citizens expressing their support for Black Lives Matter and police reform.

I have to mention at the outset that my experience of these events is permanently shaped by my service in the United States Navy. Thirty-six years ago, I walked through the gates of the United States Naval Academy as a scared, seventeen year- old high school graduate from Lakewood, Colorado. I grew up in the western part of the United States; the east coast was a mystery to me. Everything looking old, green and full of wisdom. How could I fit into such a place as this?

It turns out that most of us entering the Naval Academy felt that way, no matter where we came from across this great land. But the Academy became our unifying experience; the forge that heated and hammered us into one unit with the same goal and purpose: To support and defend the Constitution of the United States from all enemies, foreign and domestic.

And that is why I am sitting here with you today. The testimony and experiences that I share today are mine, and mine alone. I do not speak for the Naval Academy or my fellow Vets. I speak for myself.

I had always believed that when taking the oath of office, everyone else believed as we did when we took ours. That was my hope. My loadstar. That was how the United States of America continued to strive and make itself better.

But I was wrong.

Very wrong.

Having watched the early days of July turn what were predominantly peaceful protests into violence in a small area in downtown Portland, I came to understand that for some people, the oath is just a set of words, not a calling.

I watched on TV as Federal officers, (in unmarked uniforms), arbitrarily abduct U.S. citizens from the streets of Portland and shove them into rented mini-vans. I was shocked and appalled. If the U.S. Government could do this to our fellow citizens, where would it end?

Anybody can buy surplus military uniforms and rent a mini-van. How do we now know that these really are the Feds when it happens again? What if it's really the Proud Boys? Or the Boogaloos?

This was a slippery slope with massive implications for all our freedoms, not just the freedom of speech.

My decision to attend the protest was a spontaneous one and I had almost gone down the previous night. I regret not doing so since I missed a spectacular display of naked defiance and raw courage. Courage that I myself, do not possess.

When I got down to the area of the protest, I stood by the building next door to the Federal courthouse and listened to a group of physicians from the Oregon Health Sciences University talk about the serious harm that Federal officers were enacting upon their fellow citizens. The broken bones. The fried lungs. The damaged heads and brains.

This was not Portland. This was not the United States I had sworn to defend.

I walked the perimeter of the protest and was shocked to see how small the affected area actually was. Four square city blocks! That was it. From what the administration had been telling us, all of downtown Portland was in flames with uncontrolled and widespread looting everywhere.

Nope. Just four, square city blocks.

It was also peaceful when I arrived, with more the air of a festival and people excited by their cause than the violence or looting depicted by the administration. Only later at night did the mood change as people anticipated the arrival of the Federal officers like a violent and gassy wind. Everybody knew it was going to arrive, just not exactly when or where from.

When the Federal officers emerged from the courthouse, I saw them rush at the peaceful protestors in the Southwest intersection, plowing into them and knocking them down. I watched this happen in shock. I then stepped out of the park and into the street just north of the intersection and stood there, just several feet from the curb.

When the Federal officers were done dispatching the peaceful protestors in the intersection, they turned their attention towards me. The first one leveled his weapon at me as he approached, then lowered it. A second officer then plowed into me and knocked me back several feet. I then squared up, stood my ground, still stunned by what was happening. A smaller officer then proceeded to hit me with a baton five times, as other officers sprayed a chemical irritant into my face from very short range. Blinded and with a broken hand, I offered the officers a disgusted farewell salute and then started back toward the park...and into a giant cloud of teargas.

Stumbling and blinded, I was rescued by a volunteer street medic named Tav, who cared for me and bravely evacuated me to safety. It was an amazing act of courage on Tav's part, but for them and the others who were out to help, it was just another night of selfless bravery.

This is the country that we have now become. Selfless, volunteer civilian combat medics are needed to rescue their fellow citizen from the depredations of the Federal government.

There is one thing that gives me hope, however, and that is the many people from different backgrounds who are raising their voices against this outrage. A shining example for me is Duston Obermeyer, a giant USNA graduate from the class of 2001. A true combat hero and former Marine helicopter pilot with three tours into two different war zones. As it turns out, he was standing right next to me when I was struck and gassed by the Federal officers.

It was his first protest also.

And he came down with the same question that I did.

“Why are you not honoring your Oath to the Constitution?”

And from that night, the Wall of Vets was born. Now we are working together to add another voice to the call for justice we so sorely need in this country. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my experience and thank you for bringing these issues to light.