

Thank you for inviting me to testify before you. It is a great honor. I wish my mother and father were still alive to see this.

I am Oregon State Senator Lew Frederick. I proudly represent North and Northeast Portland in the Oregon Senate.

I come to the issues before you from a very simple direction: I want to feel safe. I want to feel safe walking in my neighborhood, at the grocery store, downtown, on the beaches of Oregon, in our majestic forests, and in the small towns and High desert of my state. And if I do not feel safe and I need help, I want to not have anxiety about calling police to help me because they might add to the threat disregarding my life as less than human.

It is simple. In my life I've had a police officer pull out his gun on me when I was a reporter and a passenger in a marked television news van. Until my hair turned grey I was stopped at least once a year, often driving through my now gentrified neighborhood, with the excuse that I looked lost. I worry each time a police officer pulls up behind me, worrying about whether I will live the rest of that day because of the mood of the cop or his need to show control and domination.

I have had enough. So have millions of others.

The murder of George Floyd brought that reality of my existence and other Black men forward in ways we did not expect. And it was no longer a mythical story presented by the Black community. This was a murder, on camera, by a smiling officer who was helped by three other officers around him.

From Burns to Warrenton, Umatilla to Coos Bay and Klamath Falls tens of thousands of Oregonians marched to show their outrage at Floyd's death and the history of the lack of police accountability for deadly and excessive use of force against Black and Brown people. Those that showed up were from across the demographic perspective. In Oregon, because of the low numbers of minorities living in the state, it was amazing and heartening to see white people of all ages and economic levels out of the street protesting for change.

Those who wanted to discredit these legitimate concerns went to work immediately. For personal and clearly political reasons agents provocateurs, already part of the mix of Portland demonstrations, moved quickly to create confrontations that they knew would prompt an overreaction from police forces. And then they quickly moved to the back or sides of some of the demonstrations to watch that conflict.

I have been watching these tactics develop for years. The last 70 days it has been on display for those of us on the streets of Portland. And what has not been as widely displayed has been the peaceful demonstrators constantly stopping dangerous activities.

Instead, media has spent most of its time in the middle of any conflict that develops because news focuses on the unusual, especially broadcast and visual media. Since we no longer know much about the "usual" we think of the "unusual" as normal. But when a fluid is sprayed on the concrete in front of a marble building and flames for a minute, the cameras go there. Flames are more interesting. Though they may actually have little impact or be put out by others.

I am asked often how I found my way to the Senate, to politics. My answer is always the same. When your first bout with tear gas is when you are eight or nine, social issues are going to be a primary point in your life. I spent my school years in the South, Atlanta, Baton Rouge, Tuskegee, in Civil Rights demonstrations, rallies, organizing committees. Dr. King was the Father of my playmates, he told me to quit running through the house. I marched regularly with John Lewis and Julian Bond, CT Vivian and a host of other civil rights icons.

I was one of nine desegregating my high school.

The tear gas in my past came from police, towards peaceful, unarmed marchers.

Some things have not changed in the years.

With my help and others in the Legislature, Oregon banned the use of tear gas except in "riot" situations. And then the definition of Riot was changed by officials.

Even that level of conflict was diminishing until the Homeland Security forces were brought in. Their stated goal was to bring down the intensity of the situation, "restore order" and protect federal buildings. No one bought that. The show of force with camouflaged riot gear, no identification except "police" signs, and the Gestapo tactics of spiriting away people off the streets in unmarked vans, with no charges, only brought greater numbers of outraged people to the demonstrations. Firing rubber bullets, pepper balls, tear gas canisters and other projectiles, at crowds of unarmed peaceful demonstrators only enraged Oregonians. Beating people on camera only confirmed the need to reform the police use of excessive force.

The result of the attempted occupation was not what they expected. The administration got their b-roll footage for political commercials of armed officers in riot gear and a few examples of fences being attacked along with a few flames and boarded windows. But they also got hundreds of Moms standing side by side, Dad's with leaf blowers sending tear gas and smoke away from the unarmed protestors. As one person put it, "When they fired pepper balls, we got vests, When they fired tear gas we got gas masks, when they fired rubber bullets we got helmets, when they fired all three we made shields." I want to point out that all of those are defensive reactions to offensive tactics. And the protective gear is not designed to hurt anyone.

Before someone brings up water bottles and firecrackers thrown, dumpster fires, and broken windows, I have several other observations.

Standing in the front, middle, rear of the demonstrations gives me a perspective that is not the same as the media you see. Especially in the rear of the group. Back there I recognized agents provocateurs from previous demonstrations, especially those associated with the right-wing groups. In the past wrist slingshots from behind the peaceful crowd were used to send ball bearings over the heads of the demonstrators toward the police. I saw several people goad others to walk towards the Federal officers and then quickly move to the back of the crowd once they got close. One fellow in particular, I recognized from previous demonstrations on the side of the right-wing militia crowd. I saw others handing out firecracker poppers that startle anyone, but especially folks in riot gear who were told there were terrorists in the crowd. All of those designed to elicit a response, an overreaction, to people in the peaceful crowd.

But instead of generating fear, the crowds swelled from what had become several hundred to upwards of 6-10 thousand in a week.

And now, now that the feds have left the streets, now the numbers are dropping precipitously as we return to discussing how we can make long-lasting change in police accountability with screening, recruiting, training, tracking discipline, and changes in qualified immunity.

Those will be matched with an awareness of the disparities in housing, health care, transportation and economic security and opportunity that the virus has also highlighted in the last few months.

I'll close with a conversation I had several years ago that stays with me and motivates me daily: I was talking to a young Black boy who I had known his entire life. After one of our horrendous shootings of a Black young man, he asked me a question. He said, "You always told me that if I felt unsafe I should call a policeman. But if I do, will they shoot me?"

I plan to change that future. I hope that you will help.

Thank you