

STATEMENT
OF
MARK PETTIBONE BEFORE THE
DEMOCRATIC ROUNDTABLE

AUGUST 4, 2020

Thank you, 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 Mark Pettibone. I am an essential worker, a recent graduate student at Reed College here in Portland, and, more pertinent to the issue at hand, a non-violent protester for Black Lives Matter in the wake of the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and so many more unnamed Black and Indigenous people at the hands of local and federal law enforcement.

I'm speaking with you today because I want to share my experiences and shed light on authoritarian tactics by Federal government officials that jeopardize the very fabric of our democracy.

On Tuesday, July 14th, I attended a protest in front of the Multnomah County Justice Center and Mark O. Hatfield Federal Courthouse in downtown Portland. It started as an uneventful night in terms of interactions between protestors and police forces. I listened to Black Lives Matter speakers, chanted about justice, and made new friends by playing frisbee in the park. Both Federal and Portland Police Bureau officers made brief appearances, but each quickly retreated into their respective buildings without further escalation.

At around 2:00 AM on July 15th, my friend and I decided to head home. As we walked west towards our vehicle, a small group of protesters stopped us at the corner of SW 5th Ave and Main St – blocks away from any federal property. They warned us of unmarked vans they had

seen patrolling the perimeter of the area with men who jumped out and snatched protestors who had strayed from the larger protest group.

The whole idea seemed incredible to me, but sure enough, within seconds of this conversation, an unmarked, dark-colored mini-van pulled up directly in front of us and four or five people wearing military fatigues jumped out. I was shocked and afraid for my life. I fled west on Main St while one of the people from the van pursued me on foot. As I turned the corner on Broadway, a van cut me off and, realizing I couldn't escape, I dropped to my knees, asking "Why?" several times. Nobody gave me any explanation. They didn't tell me who they were or why I was being detained; they simply forced me into the back of the of van.

Once I was inside the van, someone grabbed my hands and clutched them together above my head with one hand, using the arm of the same hand to put pressure on my head and neck to keep it down. The same person—or at least I believe it was the same person--used his or her other hand to pull my beanie over my eyes and pat me down. The person asked if I had any weapons on me and I said "No." We were then driving and someone in the van told another person to turn their communications radio down so I couldn't hear the information being communicated, even though I was too fearful and distracted to be paying attention.

The individuals in the van drove me to what I would later find out was the Mark O. Hatfield Federal Courthouse. They led me to a wall inside of a large garage where they took my picture on a cell phone. One officer asked if they should remove my backpack, to which another responded, "No, let them see him with all of this."

I was then escorted up an elevator to a floor containing multiple cells. I faced another wall while officials took my belongings, dumped out the contents of my backpack, cuffed my hands, and shackled my ankles. Someone asked if I should have a covid mask. The officer

patting me down declined, commenting that I would receive one later. Upon seeing the contents of my bag, one officer remarked, “This is a whole lotta nothing.” Another said, “At least we know his hands are clean,” apparently referring to the two bottles of hand sanitizer I had in my backpack to offer to people at the protest to combat Covid-19. One officer also made a point to gesture to another officer that I had an inhaler in my bag.

I was then placed in a cell by myself. Two officers later approached my cell, mentioning their names, but – to my best recollection – not identifying the agency they work for. They said they were about to read me my rights and that they’d record the audio. After reading me my rights, they asked if I wanted to waive them to answer some questions. I declined and asked for a lawyer, to which they responded, “This interview is terminated,” and they promptly left.

Another person then came by to ask if I had any illnesses. I said, “Yes, I have asthma and I’d like my inhaler.” They brought me my inhaler, glasses, shoes (without laces), socks, and a paper mask. After that, I simply waited.

At one point, another person was brought into a different cell down the corridor from me. This other detainee and I were eventually released with no documentation or any record of our arrests. I was given my backpack in a garbage bag. When I checked for my cell phone and wallet, I noticed that my respirator had been broken. I was released in the early morning hours out of the north side of the federal courthouse, at which point I finally understood where I’d been taken and who had taken me.

I called a friend to pick me up and, as we drove away, I saw federal officers gassing the entire block where protesters were still demonstrating. I still couldn’t believe what was happening.

I've returned to protests only twice since the night of my arrest. I would like to go more often but I'm fearful of being targeted by police or those seeking vigilante "justice" now that I'm a known party.

All in all, what I lived through was a terrible experience. But I want to make one thing absolutely clear: what happened to me occurred over a period of hours (even if it felt like days). It traumatized me in ways that I am still processing. I can't begin to fathom how it must feel for people of color who have suffered 400 years of having their rights violated in this country, generation after generation. I'm so grateful to witness the resilience and strength of the Black human spirit here in Portland, particularly among those putting in the work on the ground for this movement. That's what gives me hope for this country.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak here today and I urge you in the strongest possible way to investigate the flagrant disregard for civil rights and liberties inflicted on the citizens of my proud and wonderful city, Portland, Oregon.