

THE ORANGE COUNTY
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Mourn Laken Riley, Yet Defeat HR 7511

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President Joe Biden was at least trying to show that he could be a spontaneous politician when during his recent State of the Union speech he tried to engage with Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene about the tragic death of Laken Riley, a college student recently killed, allegedly at the hands of an illegal immigrant.

Taylor Greene had handed him a lapel button memorializing Riley, and shouted out during the speech, as is her wont, demanding that the president say her name.

Even though it sounded as if he might have conflated her name with that of USC football coach Lincoln Riley, the president engaged. Which is probably never a good idea when it comes to Greene, given her eccentricities and general meanness.

Another thing that is not a good idea is for any member of Congress to support H.R. 7511, the “Laken Riley Act,” which takes the tragedy of her death and tries to make political hay out of it in a manner that would be destructive to Americans’ civil liberties.

The first sign that the proposed law, by Rep. Mike Collins of Georgia, is not serious legislation but rather an election-year ploy is in the very first line of its language: “a) Findings. — Congress finds that the Nation (1) mourns the devastating loss of Laken Riley and other victims of the Biden administration’s open borders policies.”

Under the guise of protecting Americans against an “invasion” of “illegal aliens” bent on plundering our citizenry, the act would set a dangerous precedent that exists nowhere else in our judicial system. Under the act, if an immigrant “admitted,” under questioning, to ever “committing acts” that were criminal anywhere in the world at any time, including “shoplifting,” she or he would be subject to immediate “mandatory detention” on the spot.

There would be no arrest, no hearing, no charges, no prosecution. And the mandatory detention, under the act, would occur even if immigration officials disagreed.

This highly inflammatory, un-American end run around normal jurisprudence would be absolute catnip to any administration bent on mass deportation of immigrants who are already legally here or on shutting down our traditional role of being a safe haven for those who seek asylum from crime and despotism elsewhere.

It would violate fundamental parts of our Constitution and invite racial profiling of longtime American residents.

And it contains problematic language that would throw a wrench into the normal interaction between federal and state law enforcement. As an ACLU legal analysis says, H.R. 7511 “would also give state officials effective veto power over federal immigration enforcement decisions, empowering them to sue over federal decisions regarding the release of people from immigration detention. Arming states to sue the federal government when they disapprove of how it handles individual decisions about a person’s detention or release is a massive waste of judicial resources that will invite increasingly political lawsuits — burdening an already clogged immigration system, as well as our federal courts.”

The death of Laken Riley was tragic. And such individual tragedies can never be allowed to be used for political purposes to scapegoat others.

Contrary to xenophobic attempts such as this one to whip up anti-immigrant fervor, study after study shows that immigrants, including undocumented ones, commit crimes at much lower rates than U.S.-born people. A Stanford economist, Ran Abramitzky, found that since the 1960s, immigrants are 60% less likely to be jailed or in prison than native-born Americans.

A CATO Institute study of Texas in 2019 found that undocumented immigrants were 37.1% less likely to be convicted of a crime than other Texans. Between 2007 and 2016, the Marshall Project found zero links between undocumented immigrants and hikes in violent or property crime in American neighborhoods with the most immigrants.

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