

Portland Press Herald

The Latest: Emotions run high as anti-lynching bill stalls in Senate

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A Senate impasse over a widely backed bill to designate lynching as a federal hate crime boiled over Thursday in an emotional debate cast against a backdrop of widespread protests over police treatment of African Americans.

Standing next to a statue of abolitionist Frederick Douglass, Sen. Kamala Harris, D-Calif., left, Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., center, and Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J., pause during an event Thursday at the Capitol to commemorate the life of George Floyd. *Susan Walsh/Associated Press*

Raw feelings were evident as Sen. Rand Paul – who is single-handedly holding up the bill despite letting it pass last year – sought changes to the legislation as a condition of allowing it to pass.

But the Senate's two black Democrats, Cory Booker of New Jersey and Kamala Harris of California, protested, saying the measure should pass as is. The debate occurred as a memorial service was taking place for George Floyd, the Minneapolis man who died after a police officer knelt on his neck for almost nine minutes, sparking the protests that have convulsed the nation.

The legislative effort to make lynching a federal hate crime punishable by up to life in prison comes 65 years after 14-year-old Emmett Till was lynched in Mississippi, and follows dozens of failed attempts to pass anti-lynching legislation.

The Senate unanimously passed virtually identical legislation last year. The House then passed it by a sweeping 410-4 vote in February but renamed the legislation for Till – the sole change that returned the measure to the Senate.

“Black lives have not been taken seriously as being fully human and deserving of dignity, and it should not require a maiming or torture in order for us to recognize a lynching when we see it,” said Harris.

Read the full story on the anti-lynching bill [here](#).

Protesters take to New York City streets after curfew, again

NEW YORK — Protesters stayed on the streets of New York City after curfew for another day Thursday, spurred by the death of George Floyd.

Actions by the protesters included gathering at Brooklyn's Cadman Plaza, the site where police used batons against demonstrators who were out past the city-imposed curfew a night earlier.

Protesters continued past the 8 p.m. curfew Thursday, even after Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de Blasio sought to deflect criticism over harsh tactics from police enforcing it.

Thousands of protesters were out after curfew, and so were police.

At some locations, officials watched, but didn't immediately move in. At other spots, they made orderly arrests without the batons and riot gear, like a night earlier.

Floyd's death pushes military to face 'own demons' on race

WASHINGTON — The death of George Floyd in police hands has pushed the U.S. military to search its soul and to admit that, like the rest of America, it has fallen short on racial fairness.

A military Humvee blocks an intersection along K Street in downtown Washington on Monday as demonstrators protest the death of George Floyd. *Alex Brandon/Associated Press*

Although the military historically has prided itself on diversity, leaders acknowledge that black troops often are disproportionately subject to military legal punishment and are impeded in promotions.

"I struggle with the Air Force's own demons that include the racial disparities in military justice and discipline among our youngest black male airmen," Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force Kaleth O. Wright, an African American and the service's top enlisted airman, wrote in a social media post this week.

While tensions simmer between the Pentagon and the White House over the proper limits of military involvement in policing protests prompted by the May 25 killing of Floyd in Minneapolis, what goes largely unspoken is that many of the troops being called upon to help keep order are African Americans and other minorities.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper said little about the Floyd killing until Wednesday, when he called a news conference and declared the death a police murder. "It is a tragedy that we have seen repeat itself too many times," he said.

Esper, a West Point graduate who served 10 years on active duty in the Army, called the military a leader on the racial front. But he acknowledged it has "much to do" to improve diversity and stop discrimination.

Read the full story on racial issues in the military [here](#).

Testimony shows shooter used racist slur as Ahmaud Arbery lay dying

BRUNSWICK, Ga. — A state investigator alleged Thursday that a white man was heard saying a racist slur as he stood over Ahmaud Arbery's body, moments after fatally shooting the black man with a pump-action shotgun.

The inflammatory revelation came amid a week of angry nationwide protests over law enforcement biases against black victims that erupted after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis.

In a hearing to determine whether there is enough evidence to proceed with a murder trial, the lead Georgia Bureau of Investigation agent in the case testified that Travis and Greg McMichael

and a third man in another pickup, William “Roddie” Bryan, used their trucks to chase down and box in Arbery, who repeatedly reversed directions and ran into a ditch while trying to escape.

Travis McMichael then got out of his truck and confronted Arbery, later telling police he shot him in self-defense after Arbery refused his order to get on the ground, Special Agent Richard Dial said. A close examination of the video of the shooting shows the first shot was to Arbery’s chest, the second was to his hand, and the third was to his chest again before he collapsed in the road, Dial said.

“Mr. Bryan said that after the shooting took place before police arrival, while Mr. Arbery was on the ground, that he heard Travis McMichael make the statement, ‘f – – – ing n – – – er,’” Dial said.

Bryan gave investigators the information a week after the McMichaels’ arrest, but there’s no indication he said it to Glynn County investigators before that, Dial added.

Former White House official John Kelly defends ex-Pentagon chief’s criticism of Trump

President Trump’s former chief of staff John F. Kelly defended former defense secretary Jim Mattis on Thursday over Mattis’s criticism of the president’s handling of nationwide protests. Kelly also dismissed Trump’s assertion that the president fired the retired general in 2018.

John Kelly, President Trump’s former chief of staff, said Trump did not fire former defense chief Jim Mattis, as the president claims. *Kamran Jebreili/Associated Press*

“The president did not fire him. He did not ask for his resignation,” Kelly, a retired Marine Corps general, said in an interview. “The president has clearly forgotten how it actually happened or is confused. The president tweeted a very positive tweet about Jim until he started to see on Fox News their interpretation of his letter. Then he got nasty. Jim Mattis is a honorable man.”

Mattis tendered his resignation in 2018, citing his disagreement with Trump’s decision to pull U.S. forces out of Syria.

On Wednesday, he released a statement criticizing Trump’s handling of protests that have erupted across the country following the killing of George Floyd in police custody last week.

Mattis accused Trump of deliberately trying to divide Americans, taking exception to his threats of military force on U.S. streets, and praising those demanding justice following death of Floyd, an African American man living in Minneapolis.

“Donald Trump is the first president in my lifetime who does not try to unite the American people — does not even pretend to try. Instead, he tries to divide us,” Mattis wrote in a statement first published by the Atlantic. Trump later criticized Mattis in a tweet.

“Probably the only thing Barack Obama and I have in common is that we both had the honor of firing Jim Mattis, the world’s most overrated General. I asked for his letter of resignation, & felt great about. His nickname was ‘Chaos’, which I didn’t like, & changed it to ‘Mad Dog’,” Trump tweeted. “His primary strength was not military, but rather personal public relations. I gave him a new life, things to do, and battles to win, but he seldom ‘brought home the bacon’. I didn’t like his ‘leadership’ style or much else about him, and many others agree. Glad he is gone!”

Russia urges U.S. to respect right to protest

MOSCOW — The Russian Foreign Ministry urged the U.S. authorities to respect Americans' right for peaceful protest amid the wave of demonstrations sparked by George Floyd's death.

The ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, says Moscow has taken note of the use of tear gas to disperse rallies and massive arrests of protesters in the U.S. She also pointed out numerous journalists, including Russian reporters, were hurt while covering the protests.

Moscow long has bristled at Washington's criticism of its human rights record amid Russia-U.S. tensions. Zakharova sought to turn the tables on the U.S. by pointing to the authorities forceful response to protests.

She says "it's time for the U.S. to drop the mentor's tone and look in the mirror," challenging the U.S. authorities to "start respecting peoples' rights and observing democratic standards at home."

Supreme Court is faulted for shielding police officers from excessive-force claims

WASHINGTON — Amid nationwide protests over police killings, the Supreme Court is facing pressure to reconsider the legal immunity that often shields officers from being sued for using excessive force, including brutal arrests and the shooting of innocent people in their homes.

The high court has been sharply criticized from the left and the right for rulings in the last decade that have made it nearly impossible for many victims of police brutality or wrongful shootings to sue the officers for violating their rights. Since police officers are rarely charged with a crime, the court-created doctrine of "qualified immunity" from civil lawsuits has meant no redress for victims and little accountability for those who abuse their authority, according to the critics.

In recent weeks, justices have been considering several appeals from victims urging the court to reverse course and allow these claims to go before a jury.

Lawyers behind the appeals say the images of a Minneapolis police officer pressing his knee onto the neck of unarmed black man who is handcuffed and gasping for breath should weigh on the justices.

"It makes for grim coincidence," said Jay Schweikert, a lawyer for the Cato Institute, which has waged a campaign against police immunity. "The senseless violence committed by (police officer) Derek Chauvin — and the stunning indifference of the officers standing by as George Floyd begged for his life — is the product of our culture of near-zero accountability for law enforcement. I expect the events of the past week will increase their sense of urgency, because the justices are culpable for this doctrine that they have expounded."

He noted that the issue has been taken up by protesters who carried signs that say, "Abolish Qualified Immunity."

He and others are encouraged because legal scholars have strongly disputed the doctrine of qualified immunity, and justices on the right and left have voiced doubts. Justices Clarence Thomas and Neil M. Gorsuch have questioned the doctrine because it was invented by judges, while Justices Sonia Sotomayor and Ruth Bader Ginsburg warned about its practical impact.

The court's stance has "sent an alarming signal to law enforcement officers and the public. It tells officers that they can shoot first and think later," Sotomayor said, dissenting in *Kisela vs. Hughes* in 2018. Without bothering to hear arguments in the case, the justices overturned a lower

court and tossed out an excessive-force claim brought by a Tucson woman who was shot four times while standing in her front yard by an officer who had just arrived on the scene.

The Tucson officer had no cause to make an arrest, and he faced no danger. Nonetheless, the justices ruled the shooting victim could not sue the officer because there was no specific past ruling that “clearly established” it was unreasonable for a police officer to shoot someone in this particular circumstance.

He and two other officers had responded to a call reporting that a woman had a large kitchen knife in her hand. The officer said he feared she might attack another woman standing nearby, who turned out to be her roommate. So he decided to shoot through her chain-link fence.

Minneapolis officials estimate looting, property damage at \$55 million

MINNEAPOLIS — Officials in Minneapolis say the looting and property damage that following the death of George Floyd has caused at least \$55 million in destruction.

Vandals damaged or set fire to at least 220 buildings in the city where Floyd died, but that number is expected to go up, city officials said.

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey will ask for state and federal aid to help rebuild after the civil unrest. Until that happens, community members are pitching in to support Minneapolis neighborhoods.

More than \$1 million has been raised to help businesses in north Minneapolis, WCCO-TV reported. The West Broadway Business and Area Coalition says it will announce how they plan to use the money in the coming weeks.

The violence follows the death of Floyd, a handcuffed black man who died May 25 after a white Minneapolis police officer pressed his knee into Floyd’s neck, ignoring Floyd’s cries that he couldn’t breathe.

Prosecutors upgraded charges against the officer, Derek Chauvin, to second-degree murder on Wednesday and charged three other officers with aiding and abetting in the case that has rocked the nation with protests over race and police brutality.

Norway officials deny applications for protests

COPENHAGEN, Denmark — Authorities in Norway have turned down applications to hold rallies in the country’s three largest cities in support of protesters in the U.S. over the death of George Floyd, citing the coronavirus restrictions on gatherings.

Rallies were planned in Oslo, Bergen and Trondheim but local authorities said that without a dispensation from the Norwegian Institute of Public Health, not more than 50 people can gather in one place, Mohamed Awil, president of the African Student Association UiO told The Associated Press.

The association is co-organizing the rally in Oslo where more than 15,000 people had said they planned to take part in Thursday’s demonstration outside the U.S. Embassy. Awil said they were considering an alternative demonstration but details were not immediately available.

Similar events took place in the in the capitals of Sweden and Finland Wednesday. They attracted thousands of people even though the limit in Sweden is currently 50 and in Finland is 500.

Meghan Markle speaks out on racial divisions

LONDON — The Duchess of Sussex has shared her sadness about racial divisions in the United States, telling students at her former high school that she felt moved to speak out because the life of George Floyd mattered.

Meghan told graduates at the Immaculate Heart High School in Los Angeles that she wrestled with what to tell them given the days of protests after Floyd's death.

"I realized the only wrong thing to say is to say nothing, because George Floyd's life mattered," she said in a virtual address.

Floyd, an African-American, died after a white police officer pressed his knee into his neck in Minneapolis on May 25. The incident sparked days of protests and riots.

The former Meghan Markle, who has an African American mother and a white father, said the unrest reminded her of riots that took place in her hometown of Los Angeles after police officers were acquitted in the video-taped beating of another African-American, Rodney King.

"I remember the curfew and I remember rushing back home, and on that drive home, seeing ash fall from the sky, and smelling the smoke and seeing the smoke billow out of buildings," she said. "I remember seeing men in the back of a van just holding guns and rifles.

"I remember pulling up the house and seeing the tree, that had always been there, completely charred. And those memories don't go away."

The duchess' video was first reported by the U.S. magazine Essence.

Iran's president calls George Floyd's killing 'brutal,' criticizes Trump for posing with Bible

TEHRAN, Iran — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has called George Floyd's killing "brutal" and criticized President Donald Trump for posing for photos while holding a Bible.

Rouhani in a televised speech said Floyd "was killed in the most brutal way."

"We express sympathy toward the American people who are on the streets while harshly condemning the crime," he said, referring to Floyd's death after a white police officer was caught on video pressing his knee to Floyd's neck.

Rouhani also made reference to the clearing of peaceful protesters from a park outside the White House with chemical agents and flash bang grenades so that Trump could walk to a church for a photo opportunity.

"It is a shame that the president stands with a Bible when he plans to act against his people," Rouhani said.

Iranian officials regularly take advantage of protests in the U.S. to criticize the administration, even though Iran itself in November put down nationwide demonstrations by killing hundreds, arresting thousands and disrupting internet access.

A protester and a police officer stare at one another on the Crescent City Connection bridge, which spans the Mississippi River in New Orleans, Wednesday, June 3, 2020, during a protest.
AP Photo/Gerald Herbert

NEW ORLEANS — Police in New Orleans released tear gas on hundreds of demonstrators who pushed past a line of officers to cross a Mississippi River bridge during demonstrations against the death of George Floyd.

A [video of the incident](#) obtained by The Times Picayune / The New Orleans Advocate shows a crowd of protesters running, shoving past each other, and shouting “walk” on Wednesday night as smoke envelops the background of the bridge.

The encounter came hours after a rally and a march that started near the New Orleans City Hall. Some protesters were chanting curses at New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees, who earlier Wednesday was criticized by fellow high-profile athletes, including LeBron James, and some of his own teammates after saying in an interview with Yahoo! he opposed kneeling during the national anthem.

More demonstrators march on U.S. Capitol

WASHINGTON — Demonstrators marched to the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday night, protesting the death of George Floyd in Minnesota and demanding that laws be changed to prevent more like it.

Along their route from near the White House, there were troops in fatigues and officers from federal agencies keeping watch on the crowd. Barricades were put up around the Capitol, and the Capitol Police stood guard behind them.

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“We came here because they make laws here and we want the laws to change,” said Mohammed Wagdy, 26, of nearby Prince George’s County.

As an 11 p.m. curfew in Washington neared, community activists urged the demonstrators to head home. Some did, but others said they were returning to the White House.

Full autopsy results on George Floyd released

MINNEAPOLIS — A full autopsy of George Floyd, the handcuffed black man who died after being restrained by Minneapolis police, provides several clinical details — including that Floyd had tested positive for COVID-19.

The 20-page report released Wednesday by the Hennepin County Medical Examiner’s Office came with the family’s permission and after the coroner’s office released summary findings Monday that Floyd had a heart attack while being restrained by officers, and classified his May 25 death as a homicide.

The report by Chief Medical Examiner Andrew Baker spelled out clinical details, including that Floyd tested positive for COVID-19 on April 3 but appeared asymptomatic. The report also noted Floyd's lungs appeared healthy but he had some narrowing of arteries in the heart.

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The county's earlier summary report listed fentanyl intoxication and recent methamphetamine use under "other significant conditions" but not under "cause of death." The full report's footnotes noted that signs of fentanyl toxicity can include "severe respiratory depression" and seizures.

Drew Brees' anthem comments draw backlash from teammates, others

NEW ORLEANS — Drew Brees was sharply criticized by fellow high-profile athletes, including some of his own teammates, on Wednesday after the Saints quarterback reiterated his opposition to kneeling during the national anthem.

In an interview with Yahoo, Brees was asked to revisit former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick's 2016 protest of police brutality against minorities, in which Kaepernick knelt during the national anthem before games.

"I will never agree with anybody disrespecting the flag of the United States," Brees began, adding that the national anthem reminds him of his grandfathers, who served in the armed forces during World War II. "In many cases, it brings me to tears thinking about all that has been sacrificed, and not just in the military, but for that matter, those throughout the civil rights movements of the '60s, and all that has been endured by so many people up until this point."

Critical responses to Brees' statements appeared on social media from a couple major professional athletes, including the Los Angeles Lakers' LeBron James and Saints safety Malcolm Jenkins.

Jenkins was Brees' teammate when the Saints won the Super Bowl in the 2009 season, but spent the past six seasons with the Philadelphia Eagles before returning to New Orleans this offseason.

Brees has said he supports those protesting police brutality but that he does not see the national anthem as the proper forum for that. In 2017, Brees participated with teammates who knelt before the national anthem, but then stood in unison when the anthem was played.