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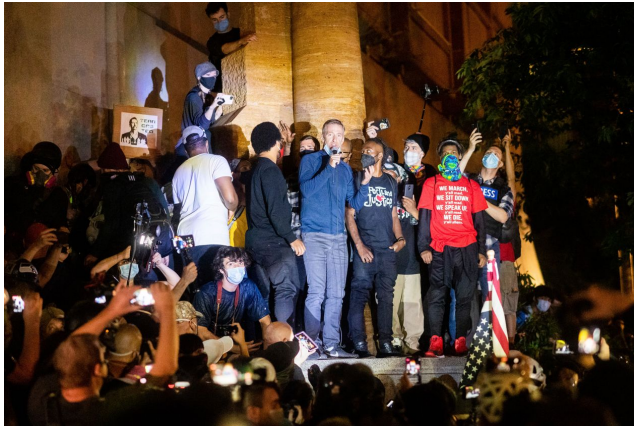
OPINION | COMMENTARY

Why Do Democrats Defend Disorder?

My party always stood for principled dissent, not lawless chaos.

By *Ted Van Dyk*

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Mayor Ted Wheeler speaks to Black Lives Matter protesters in Portland, Ore., July 22.

PHOTO: NOAH BERGER/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Democrats' response to the continuing round of urban disturbances makes one think that, yet again, they will snatch electoral defeat from the jaws of victory.

After President Trump's dispatch of federal officers to protect federal facilities in Portland, Ore., some Democratic politicians characterized

the officers as “storm troopers” or “secret agents” bent on sending “peaceful protesters” to concentration camps. I watched attacks on the Portland federal building on television as they were happening. The officers were uniformed and clearly identified. The perpetrators weren’t peaceful protesters but black-clad thugs using hammers and baseball bats to damage the building. Others attempted to set fire to it.

Local and state officials objected to the federal presence, saying it “made things worse” in the city. On the same evening, a group in Seattle paraded to a police precinct headquarters, breaking shop windows along the way. Several officers were injured. In New York, Mayor Bill de Blasio was forced to evict occupiers from City Hall Plaza.

Meantime, violent crime is on the rise in cities around the country. Chicago has been experiencing a murder plague visited on mostly minority residents over many months. It seems incredible that elected Democrats are supporting initiatives to defund the police, releasing prisoners from local jails, and even removing law-enforcement officers from schools.

Democrats should forget President Trump for a second. The current round of violence isn’t being undertaken by civil-justice or other reformers but by radicals using Jacobin street-violence tactics. The idea is to provoke confrontation and violence with constituted authority so as to discredit it, counting on a few gullible local residents to see police as oppressors. The pretense of peaceful protest is rapidly disappearing. Deaths, serious injuries, arson, public and private property damage, and economic dislocation have resulted.

The longer this continues, the greater demand to see it stopped will grow among wage-earning families, small-business people, homeowners, taxpayers and voters. Families of public safety and emergency personnel already have been alienated.

Any president dating back to Franklin D. Roosevelt would have taken action under these circumstances. First, there would be denunciation of the violence. Then the president would ask local officials if they needed federal help. If the answer was yes, it would be sent immediately. If the answer was no but disorder continued, the president would no doubt dispatch officers to protect federal buildings and otherwise restore order as authorized by the Constitution. He would know that the country at large looked to the president as the ultimate guarantor of public safety.

I can’t imagine Joe Biden, as vice president or a senator, hesitating to denounce lawlessness. Nor can I imagine past congressional, state and

local leaders condoning such destruction. Democrats have always supported dissent, not disorder.

Many of Mr. Trump's policies deserve criticism, but this isn't one of them. Democrats are presenting a pro-chaos caricature of themselves, which will discredit them with the public if they maintain it. Especially at the local level, elected officials must recognize that a majority of Americans want to live normal lives without threat of violence or harm.

Mr. Van Dyk was active in Democratic national policy and politics for 40 years. He is author of "Heroes, Hacks and Fools" (University of Washington Press, 2007).

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