

Senate Democrats capitulate to racism on anti-immigrant bill

written by Stephen Millies
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Thirty-three Democratic Senators — led by Charles Schumer — voted on Dec. 9 to push along the anti-immigrant Laken Riley Act, virtually guaranteeing its eventual

passage. This legislation will allow the deportation of immigrants, including children, who are merely charged — not convicted — of shoplifting and other minor offenses.

Whatever happened to the “presumption of innocence”? Weren’t we told in grade school that defendants in the United States were considered innocent until proven guilty?

The bill is demagogically named after Laken Riley, a 22-year-old nursing student in Athens, Georgia, who was killed last year while jogging. José Antonio Ibarra, an immigrant from Venezuela, was convicted of killing Riley.

Bigots in Congress and on Fox News are cynically using this tragedy to smear millions of immigrants as dangerous criminals. It’s no different than saying if a Black, Latinx, Muslim, Jewish, or transgender person was guilty of a crime, then all of “them” should be punished.

Georgia politician Mike Collins sponsored this hate legislation in the House of Representatives. He had earlier introduced his self-named [RAZOR Act](#) to allow Texas to string concertina wire in the Rio Grande so migrant children and their families could be cut to shreds.

The [NAACP](#) has demanded Collins be investigated. He praised white fraternity students at the University of Mississippi who racially taunted and made ape-like gestures towards a Black woman who was protesting the genocide of Palestinians.

One of the loudest congressional backers of the Laken Riley Act is Collins’ fellow Georgian, Marjorie Taylor Greene. This nutjob claimed that the 2018 California forest fires were caused by space lasers, including those allegedly manipulated by Jewish people.

Both Collins and Greene were silent when another jogger, the 25-year-old Black man

Ahmaud Arbery, was murdered in 2020 while jogging near Brunswick, Georgia. The local district attorney advised that no arrests be made. It took people mobilizing in Georgia and across the country that Arbery's killers were brought to trial and convicted.

To mock the Black Lives Matter movement, Greene wears a t-shirt emblazoned "Say Her Name: Laken Riley." Tens of thousands of people wore t-shirts saying, "Say Her Name: Breonna Taylor," in memory of the Black woman who was killed in 2020 by Louisville, Kentucky, police.

[Greene](#) hates the Black Lives Matter movement and compares it to the Ku Klux Klan.

Cowardly retreat before Trump

Last year, Senate Democrats stopped this legislation using the Senate's filibuster rule, which requires the approval of 60 senators before a bill can be voted on. But following Trump's narrow victory, the vast majority of Democratic senators are jumping on the anti-immigrant train.

Only eight Democrats and independent Bernie Sanders refused to go along.

Democratic Senators John Fetterman from Pennsylvania and Rubén Gallego from Arizona are among the sponsors of the Laken Riley Act.

These politicians are not only craven but also shortsighted. In a country of 340 million people, Trump won by less than 2.3 million votes. Just the drop-off in Democratic votes in California — 1.8 million — accounted for most of that.

Trump's nutty and dangerous cabinet picks are already provoking derision. So are his schemes to invade Greenland, Panama, Mexico, Canada, and maybe — with his sidekick Elon Musk — Mars.

The 33 Senate Democrats allowing this anti-immigrant bill to proceed are like those who supported the Iraq war over 20 years ago. Half of the Democratic Senators — including Joe Biden, Charles Schumer, John Kerry, and Hillary Clinton — voted for the 2002 resolution to allow George W. Bush to wage his bloody war.

Kerry's vote didn't do him any good when he ran for president in 2004. Neither did it help Clinton in 2016.

Echoes of Dred Scott

In its notorious 1857 Dred Scott decision, the U.S. Supreme Court declared Black people had no rights that white people need to respect. The Laken Riley Act tells cops and judges that immigrants have no rights at all.

Any bigot with a badge will be able to racially profile someone who they think “looks funny” and claim they stole a candy bar. In some states, a person can be accused of shoplifting without even attempting to leave a store.

That's what happened to Frank Wills, the Black security guard who caught Richard Nixon's Watergate burglars on June 17, 1972. In 1979, Wills was accused of hiding a pair of sneakers in a bag. South Carolina authorities jailed the Watergate hero in revenge for helping to drive Nixon out of the White House.

The congressional steamroller to pass the Laken Riley Act goes hand-in-hand with Trump's vow to take away citizenship from children born in the United States whose parents are immigrants.

Trump's proposed action — which he promises to accomplish by

executive order — would repeal the 14th Amendment to the Constitution, overturning the Dred Scott decision. Along with the 13th and 15th amendments, it was written in the blood of hundreds of thousands of members of the Union Army

and Navy who defeated the slave masters.

States rights vs. human rights

The [Laken Riley bill](#) would also allow state attorney generals to sue the federal government on immigration matters. It gives them the right to take the State Department to court if visas are issued to people from countries that don't allow deportations from the United States.

This not only echoes Trump's ban on immigrants from Muslim countries. It also recalls the old Confederate slogan of "states' rights." Immigration, like tariffs, was always a matter for the federal government.

Ronald Reagan began his 1980 presidential campaign by calling for "states' rights" in Philadelphia, Mississippi. Reagan — who called the people of Watts, California, "mad dogs" — did so where the martyrs James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner were murdered by the Mississippi Ku Klux Klan.

Any actions by state officials, like the corrupt homophobic and transphobic bigot Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton, concerning immigration recalls the repudiated doctrine of "interposition."

Segregationists claimed that state legislatures had the right to overturn U.S. Supreme Court decisions. That's what the [Mississippi legislature did in 1956](#) by unanimously declaring invalid the Supreme Court's Brown vs. Board decision that banned school segregation.

The decision of most Senate Democrats to turn their backs on immigrant rights shows that we have to organize ourselves. The demonstrations scheduled in Washington, D.C., and across the country against Trump's inauguration are a good start.

The labor movement should call a new Solidarity Day against Trump. We need to continue to struggle to stop the genocide in Gaza and the war against poor people here in the United States.

