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ANOTHER OPINION

A long way to go on police reform

Minneapolis Judge Peter Cahill on Friday sentenced former police officer Derek Chauvin to 22.5 years in prison for murdering George Floyd in May 2020. The sentencing cannot bring back Floyd, erase the pain his killing inflicted on countless people or solve the nation's ongoing problem with racism in policing. But it should bring a measure of satisfaction that justice was served and assure Americans that the system is not hopelessly broken.

Yet that is not the standard to which a country premised on equality before the law should hold its criminal justice system. Policing in the United States could be more effective and less threatening to minority communities. Officers who commit wrongdoings could face more certain punishments. Floyd's death last spring appeared to spur a reckoning on U.S. policing, but that momentum has slowed in recent months.

A case in point is the effort in Congress to pass a bipartisan criminal justice reform bill. Negotiators had hoped to strike a deal by the May 25 anniversary of Floyd's murder. Then they aimed to finish by Mr. Chauvin's sentencing. Both deadlines have now passed. Negotiators said Thursday that they had made substantial progress. But they also admitted that finishing the talks would be difficult, and the Senate has recessed for two weeks. After lawmakers return, their attention will be on major infrastructure bills, and the window to act may close as the 2022 midterm elections approach.

House Democrats passed in March a sweeping policing reform bill that would create a national police misconduct database, impose new police training requirements, make it easier for federal attorneys to prosecute police abuses and ban chokeholds and no-knock warrants. It would also curb "qualified immunity," a legal doctrine shielding police officers from civil lawsuits — and thereby discouraging people with legitimate claims against police from seeking redress. But Republicans oppose the plan, dooming its prospects in the Senate.

U.S. Sens. Cory Booker, D-N.J., and Tim Scott, R-S.C., along with U.S. Rep. Karen Bass, D-Calif., have sought compromise on qualified immunity and on how much to enable federal prosecutors to pursue criminal civil rights cases against officers. But they have yet to complete a deal.

They must keep trying, and not by simply giving up on issues such as qualified immunity. The Supreme Court imposed this doctrine with thin grounding in statutory text. It immunizes officers from civil penalties unless they commit a "clearly established" constitutional violation, which may not include even outrageous abuses unless officers have been successfully sued for similar violations in the past. Congress should clarify that federal law is not as permissive as the courts have declared. Mr. Booker has proposed limiting qualified immunity by placing more liability on police departments, rather than individual officers, a fair compromise that would give departments and their political overseers more incentive to restrain police violence.

George Floyd has been dead a year. His killer will be in prison for two decades to come. But his legacy is still up in the air.

— *The Washington Post*



Taking in the scene in Wellington the day before Trump's rally

Within a mile from the muddy parking area of the Lorain County Fairgrounds, no less than four pop-up merchandise stands were operating Friday afternoon, hawking T-shirts, flags, bumper stickers and ball caps with the name of their hero.

A blond teen asked me as I approached: "Dirty or not?"

"I'm sorry?"
"You want dirty or not?" she said, and slid over a bumper sticker to me. It referenced President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris and intimated sexual acts.

It was the hottest seller of the day, she said. When I didn't say anything, she shrugged her shoulders. "It's just words," she said, straightening a hat with God, a peace sign and Jesus carrying his cross. Flags inviting Biden, and his voters, to perform very intimate acts snapped in the wind while a young boy bought a camouflage hat with a logo for the former president.

The branding was confusing. The top of the tents were outlined with "Back The Blue," a distinctly pro-law enforcement message, as were several of the flags waving in the pre-storm gloom.

But not a mention of the last time former President Donald Trump held a rally, exhorting his followers to march on the U.S. Capitol.

That speech got him impeached a second time. The attack led to more than 140 Capitol Police officers being wounded. Some suffered traumatic brain injuries and permanent disabilities and will never return to work.

What backing were those blue given? A short distance away, I approached another stand, this one at the end of Fairgrounds Road, a "last stop shop" for those going to the rally to see a former president. The rally was to drum



RINI JEFFERS

up support for a candidate to unseat Ohio's 16th Congressional District representative, Anthony Gonzalez, R-Rocky River.

"Do you know why he's coming here?" I asked the man behind the table. "He told the media he's stumping for Max Miller to beat Gonzalez, but this isn't the 16th District."

Wellington is represented in Congress by U.S. Rep. Bob Gibbs, a Republican deemed suitably loyal to the last administration. I asked around. It seemed no one knew why the fight would be brought here, to Lorain County.

The man, who told me he's traveled to rallies throughout Ohio and Michigan and as far as North Carolina, shook his head no.

A young blue-haired and tattooed woman in the booth told me she was never into politics at all until Trump. She whipped out a smartphone to look up the flags closest to the road, a pile of white flags with a red cross in the corner of blue.

I recognized them as Christian flags; the red cross symbolizes the blood of Christ, sacred to Christians who believe Christ died for their sins. Several items bore crosses, and Jesus, and AR-15s.

"God, guns and guts made this country; don't take them now," one flag urged.

"I do these Trump things; I do Pride," the blue-haired woman said. I asked if she thought those two markets were at

odds with each other. In office, Trump rolled back many LGBTQ protections.

"No, because I'm gay and I don't care about any of that," she said. "I love your shirt, too."

My shirt was a black tee with huge white letters spelling out ANTI-RACIST. "Thank you very much," I said, smiling.

Over at the Certified Marathon, a cashier was resigned to giving out information.

"The gates are opening at 2," she said, making change. She said business was brisk and expected to get busier. She already was worried about how she would get through the crowd along Herrick Avenue in time for work Saturday afternoon. "It's going to be a parade out there of people lining up to see — I don't know. Whatever they think they'll see."

Down at Fort's Tavern, staff members were bracing for the weekend.

"We expect it will be different," an employee said, carefully choosing her words. "We are not one party or another. We just want people to be safe, have fun and be taken care of. There is no need for all this hate."

Over at the fairgrounds, a steady stream of supporters were trickling in and claiming parking spots a day early, most sporting Trump flags and self-drawn graffiti.

"The famine in the END TIMES is not for bread but for the word of God! Trump won! Biden is not my president DEMONCRATES cheated" was written on the Jeep next to me. The words began to blur in the rain.

I drove home, watching the foreboding sky. The storms were rolling in.

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It's no secret why conservatives find education so dangerous

I owe a lot to Gary Mahoney.

He was the campus conservative back in the middle '70s, when I was a student at the University of Southern California and we went at it hammer and tongs a few times on the opinion pages of the Daily Trojan. I no longer recall the details of our disagreements. What I do remember is realizing that he was good and that I had to up my game — tighten my reasoning, sharpen my logic — if I hoped to stay in the ring with him.

He made me better in the same way college itself did. Nearly five decades later, I value those years less for any specific thing I learned in class than for the fact that I learned how to think. Not "what" to think, but how, i.e., how to gather and evaluate information, how to analyze and extrapolate from it, how to defend my ideas in the scrum of intellectual conflict.

That's a lesson students will be denied if Republicans like Ron DeSantis get their way. Last week, Florida's governor signed a bill requiring the state's public colleges and universities to survey students and faculty on their ideological beliefs. The aim, he claims, is to prevent schools from "indoctrinating" students. DeSantis has hinted that those failing to show "intellectual diversity" will face budget cuts.

You may gauge the sincerity of his commitment to that diversity by the fact that this comes two weeks after he



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pushed to ban the teaching of critical race theory — an academic framework originated by legal scholars over 40 years ago. Like other states where similar restrictions are becoming law, Florida seeks not to further intellectual diversity, but to prevent it.

Meaning, it aims to protect kids raised on mom and dad's steady diet of Fox "News" and Breitbart from the shock of having any ideas they've thereby imbibed challenged in the outside world. Which is hypocritical on its face. After all, conservatives once — not unreasonably — chided liberals for trying to bubble-wrap students with trigger warnings and safe spaces. Now they use force of law to do the very same thing.

It should go without saying that it's none of the state's business what you or I think. It should be likewise obvious that this law will stifle debate and muzzle instructors and is thus antithetical to the mission of our colleges and universities.

There is no mystery why conservatives find education dangerous. A 2015 Pew Research Center study

quantified that the better educated one is, the more likely one is to hold liberal beliefs. But I'd argue, contrary to what conservatives seem to feel, that's not because of bullying professors shouting left-wing dogma. Rather, it's because once you learn how to think, you're less susceptible to thin reasoning and easy answers. And increasingly, that's all conservatism's got.

That may not have been true — or at least, may have been less true — decades ago. But back then, the right had some intellectual underpinning, had yet to devolve into the twitching id of perpetual resentment now on daily display. I mean, is anyone overawed by the profundity of Matt Gaetz and Marjorie Taylor Greene? How about Louie Gohmert? Or even Ron DeSantis?

An opinion one can't defend — using actual facts and recognizable reason — is an opinion not worth having. At some level, conservatives must know they fail that standard, so they work to undermine it instead, to make the world safe for ignorance.

Teach your children well, the songwriter said. But this is the opposite of that.

I like to think Gary Mahoney would agree.

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