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# House passes George Floyd Justice in Policing Act before shutting down due to possible militia plot (/stories/2021/3/4/2019301/-House-passes-major-police-reform-bill-but-qualified-immunity-will-be-a-sticking-point-in-the-Senate)



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The House of Representatives worked late Wednesday night to wrap up key business before closing on Thursday due to warnings of a conspiracy theory-driven militia plan to attack (<https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2021/03/04/2019262/-Warning-of-%E2%80%99militia-plot,-fueled-by-March-4-conspiracy-theories,-induces-House-to-shut-down>) the Capitol on March 4. Despite those fears, the House passed two important bills on Wednesday night: the For the People Act (<https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2021/3/3/2019203/-House-Democrats-just-passed-the-most-important-democracy-reforms-since-the-1965-Voting-Rights-Act>), a wide-ranging voting and election reform bill, and the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/george-floyd-police-reform-bill-vote/2021/03/03/5ea9ba3a-7c6c-11eb-85cd-9b7fa90c8873\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/george-floyd-police-reform-bill-vote/2021/03/03/5ea9ba3a-7c6c-11eb-85cd-9b7fa90c8873_story.html)).

“There is a systemic problem with policing in the United States. By enacting transformative reform on a national level, we have a chance to address it,” Rep. Karen Bass, the author of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act wrote in a *USA Today* op-ed (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/voices/2021/03/03/rodney-king-beating-george-floyd-video-police-refrom-karen-bass-column/6890647002/>). “Though named in his honor, Congress must not pass the [George Floyd Justice in Policing Act](https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/7120) (<https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/7120>) to honor one man—but to honor all the unarmed (<https://www.npr.org/2020/12/23/949751619/columbus-ohio-police-officer-fatally-shoots-an-unarmed-black-man>) people who have been brutalized or killed by police since his death and the many more who were brutalized or killed prior.”

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The bill includes the creation of national standards for policing, bans on chokeholds and some no-knock warrants, measures against racial and religious profiling, a registry of officers dismissed for excessive use of force, eases standards for prosecution of officers, and overhauls qualified immunity.

The doctrine of qualified immunity (<https://www.dailykos.com/stories/2020/6/9/1951855/-Police-are-losing-public-trust-especially-among-young-voters>) protects police and other officials from facing lawsuits over abuses they commit in their official capacities. It tells police officers they will not face repercussions for even truly gross abuses, like a case where a group of officers debated where to tase a woman for the offense of refusing to sign a speeding ticket, then tased her three times while she was seven months pregnant.

Interestingly, after years of expanding qualified immunity, the Supreme Court recently sent a signal it might be ready to rein it in in somewhat, reversing an appeals court's

dismissal—on qualified immunity grounds—of a case where a psychiatric prison unit held a suicidal prisoner first in a cell “covered, nearly floor to ceiling, 'in massive

amounts' of feces: all over the floor, the ceiling, the window, the walls, and even 'packed inside the water faucet,’” and then in another cell with no toilet and only a clogged floor drain, as a result of which the prisoner “held his bladder for over 2 hours, but he eventually (and involuntarily) relieved himself, causing the drain to overflow and raw sewage to spill across the floor. Because the cell lacked a bunk, and because Taylor was confined without clothing, he was left to sleep naked in sewage.”

We'll see where the court goes—was this a one-off or a sign of a shift?—but that's the kind of case that has traditionally been dismissed because of qualified immunity. And qualified immunity is a key sticking point for Republicans (<https://www.latimes.com/world-nation/story/2021-03-03/with-bidens-backing-dems-revive-bill-to-overhaul-policing>). Republican Sen. Tim Scott has backed policing reform, but will not get on board with qualified immunity. “We have to protect individual officers,” he said, calling it “a red line for me.”

Absorb that: Scott is the Republican most on board with policing reform and his red line is protecting the doctrine that allows police officers to tase a pregnant woman repeatedly for not signing a speeding ticket and then be protected even from a civil lawsuit.

The bill passed 220 to 212, with two Democrats—Reps. Jared Golden of Maine and Ron Kind of Wisconsin—voting against and one Republican, Rep. Lance Gooden of Texas, accidentally voting for it (<https://thehill.com/homenews/house/51553-sole-gop-vote-on-police-reform-bill-says-he-accidentally-pushed-the-wrong?rl=1>). He filed paperwork to change his vote and unleashed a torrent of insult against the bill to show that he really, really isn't in favor of policing reform.

