

in Minnesota. I will tell you that this event of May 25 cannot be written off as a simple use of force or as being unfortunate or regrettable. We all know that, on that day, George Floyd was killed by a police officer while other officers looked on and heard his begging for life and his cries for help. The officers responsible should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

I offer my prayers and condolences to the Floyd family, just as so many other Members of this Chamber have done, and I support the President's call for the Justice Department to investigate this death.

CENSORSHIP

Mr. President, our country was built on the premise of dissent, and we have seen the power that peaceful protests have in their ability to bring change to every level of government. Unfortunately, over the past week, we have also seen what happens when criminals and shadowy professionals exploit these public expressions of frustration and pain.

Every single day, Americans are waking up to find that their neighborhoods have been destroyed, and they watch news reports that are dominated by lawlessness. Many activists and members of the mainstream media have attempted to force us into choosing between solidarity and maintaining law and order. This is a false choice. It is one that we ought to reject. Instead, we should fight for accountability, compassion, and understanding. At the same time, we must condemn racism, hatred, and the violence that has torn apart so many neighborhoods this very week.

We should also celebrate and defend our right to peaceful disagreement in the streets, in the classroom, and online just as well as in this very Chamber. Unfortunately, too often, this right is not celebrated. Over the years, we have documented Big Tech's history of censorship, particularly the censorship of dissenting conservative voices. During the 2018 election cycle, a series of pro-life ads that I sponsored on social media were taken down for having content the platform labeled as "inflammatory."

For years, conservatives have been fighting a losing war against content moderation policies that act as a drag-net for dissenting opinions. Last week, Twitter rolled out a new "fact-checking" feature and almost immediately botched a fact check on one of President Trump's tweets. Unfortunately, for Twitter, the President was not afraid to point out how easy it is for private companies to make mistakes that turn moderation into speech policing. We know that social media companies have subjectively manipulated their algorithms to capture conservative opinions and conservative elected officials. They have been doing this for too long for it to just be a mere mistake. These are not unintended consequences.

Last week, President Trump signed an Executive order to bring some much

needed attention to the issue, and we thank him for that. As head of the Judiciary Committee's Tech Task Force, I look forward to working with the White House and the Justice Department to preserve free speech online for all Americans.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

PROTESTS

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, we know that America is hurting. It is reeling from a deadly pandemic that has taken more than 100,000 lives and then from witnessing the broad daylight murder—murder—of yet another Black man by an officer of the law. It seethes with rage and sorrow about the racial injustices that still plague our society. America is suffering from unprecedented political divisions that are routinely worsened and deepened by a President whose every utterance only tears us further apart. In my decades in the U.S. Senate, I have never seen our country so in need of healing.

I was a prosecutor. So, when I first saw the video of George Floyd's murder—a human being who was pinned down by the neck, cried "I can't breathe," and desperately called out for his mother—I was shocked to my core. For millions of Americans and for me, that shock swiftly turned into anger.

How could a police officer, who has sworn an oath to protect and serve, so casually take a human being's life? Why did his fellow officers who witnessed the murder that we all witnessed on video stand there and do nothing to stop it? How could this happen in plain sight when multiple onlookers begged the officer to relent—stop his murderous conduct—as George fell unconscious?

I was left sickened and shaken.

I do not know and did not know George Floyd, but imagine if he were your neighbor or your friend. Imagine if George Floyd were your brother, your son, your husband, or your grandchild. Imagine if George Floyd simply looked like your loved one and shared the same skin color. Imagine the concern you would have for such a person who lived in constant fear of those who are responsible to protect us all. So it is no surprise that protests swept our Nation in the wake of this murder. Communities of color and all those who sympathize with them are fed up. They are sick and tired of the fact that African Americans are nearly 2½ times as likely as White Americans to be killed by police officers. No one of good conscience can sit idly by while African-American lives are treated with less worth. Our country long ago promised equal rights and equal justice.

Now protesters are aching for real accountability for officers of the law who engage in lawless violence. It is not simply justice for George Floyd; it is justice for Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice. The list goes on and on, which is why the protests go on and on.

Too often, people feel the police officers who take Black lives are treated like they are above the law. They feel the justice system has been fueled by a culture of impunity that shields the same officers who abuse the public's trust. Too often the accountability comes after incontrovertible evidence, such as a damning video, happens to surface and the public demands justice.

I can say, as one who served proudly in law enforcement and has served proudly in the Senate, ultimately accountability will require dismantling this culture of impunity, as well as ensuring that law enforcement agencies have training and policies in place to serve to rebuild trust in communities of color.

The protesters demand more from our justice system. They demand more from a nation that promises that nobody is above the law. Well, I stand with them, and Congress has to, too. None of us condone, and indeed I have strongly condemned, the looting and violence that has sadly taken place alongside the peaceful protests and the extremists and opportunists who have co-opted the peaceful process. They are not serving justice. They are not going to bring the change our country so badly needs.

My hero, a dear friend who has called me his brother, Representative JOHN LEWIS, said just a few days ago:

[L]ooting and burning is not the way.

Organize. Demonstrate. Sit-in. Stand-up. Vote. Be constructive, not destructive.

I hope everybody will listen to what Representative LEWIS said. I hope our fellow Americans will heed his wise words. I refuse to partake in efforts seeking to delegitimize all protesters and create even more distrust and division. Demonstrators demanding accountability are not thugs, as President Trump has called them. No one should threaten state-sanctioned violence against protesters, as this President and some of his allies have. I strongly oppose any efforts to invoke the Insurrection Act to unleash our military against these domestic demonstrations, as President Trump has absurdly threatened.

Our military is one of our Nation's most sacred institutions. It serves to safeguard our constitutional rights against enemies abroad. They should never be ordered to American streets as the battlefield, which would only incite further chaos and deprive Americans of their right to peacefully assemble. That is not the America we know and love. It is not the America I know and love.

Unfortunately, President Trump has proven that he is incapable or perhaps he is uninterested in healing and uniting our Nation. At every turn his instinct is to divide and escalate. During every crisis he manages to manufacture another of his own making. When Americans are in desperate need of a consoler in chief, a role that I have seen every past President play during my years in the Senate—every one of