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Democrats Walk Away from Police Reform Negotiations

Bipartisan police reform negotiations appear to be dead as the lead Democrat negotiators, Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Representative Karen Bass (D-CA), walked away from negotiations with Senator Tim Scott (R-SC) on September 21 after not being able to come to a final deal after months of negotiations. Discussions seemed to be stuck on the same issues – qualified immunity, the Department of Defense 1033 Program, the use of chokeholds, no-knock warrants, and certification and accreditation for law enforcement officers and agencies – without any sense of being able to reach an agreement on legislative language.

Rep. Bass appeared to place most of the blame on the inflexibility of police unions for negotiations failing, but speaking for NAPO, we were open to the intent of many of the proposals around the use of force, no-knock warrants, the 1033 program, and accreditation and certification, amongst others, as long as officers' rights and the ability to protect themselves were protected. NAPO's priorities throughout this process have been to safeguard the individual rights of officers. We were working to protect qualified immunity and other long standing, constitutional good faith legal protections for officers, ensure officer due process is protected, officer privacy and confidentiality rights are guarded, and the rights of law enforcement to bargain over accountability and disciplinary actions are not eroded. Unfortunately, protecting officers' rights was not a priority for Democrat negotiators and they decided to walk away from the table rather than consider the concerns and views of the men and women in law enforcement.

With bipartisan police reform apparently dead and the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act not going anywhere in the Senate, Democrats are sure to try to pass reform provisions through other pieces of legislation. NAPO will be monitoring any and all major pieces of legislation where police reform provisions could be included to ensure nothing gets passed surreptitiously.