Senate Democrats cover for Trump's violent assault on immigrants, democratic rights at Blanche hearing

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On Wednesday, Acting Attorney General Todd Blanche appeared before the Senate Judiciary Committee for his confirmation hearing to become the permanent head of the Department of Justice. While Democratic senators grilled Blanche over the Epstein cover-up and a proposed slush fund for the January 6 militia members, they remained virtually silent on the Trump administration's escalating campaign of state violence against immigrants and repression of left-wing, anti-ICE and anti-genocide protesters.

During nearly five hours of questioning, only three Democrats—Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota, Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut and Alex Padilla of California—raised the recent murders carried out by agents of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and other federal immigration police. Padilla was the only senator to name Lorenzo Salgado Araujo and Johan Sebastián Guerrero, immigrant workers ambushed and gunned down by immigration agents in Texas and Maine over the last week while on their way to work.

Not a single Democrat raised the prosecution and draconian sentencing of the anti-ICE Prairieland defendants in Texas, the administration's parallel prosecutions of protesters in Ann Arbor, Michigan and the Twin Cities, or the July 5 killing of 20-year-old Tyrin Johnson by a National Guard soldier in Memphis, Tennessee.

The Democrats' silence was all the more revealing given Blanche's record. Trump's former personal attorney, Blanche has continued to function in all essential respects as the president's lawyer while directing the Department of Justice. He has overseen investigations and prosecutions targeting Trump's political opponents while the department shields federal agents responsible for killing workers and parents.

Blanche briefly acknowledged this continuing relationship during friendly questioning from Republican Senator John Kennedy. Asked whether he and Trump were friends, Blanche replied, "I'm his lawyer," before correcting himself to say that he "was his lawyer."

The overwhelmingly cordial and bipartisan character of the hearing was established at its outset by ranking Democrat Dick Durbin of Illinois, who opened with an extended tribute to recently deceased Republican Senator Lindsey Graham.

"I want to acknowledge the obvious empty seat at the dais here, next to the chairman," Durbin said. "The committee is mourning the loss of our friend and colleague Senator Lindsey Graham." Durbin recalled serving alongside Graham since 2003 and said, "I have cherished memories of both our fierce partisan battles and our landmark bipartisan agreements."

Gesturing toward the bouquet of flowers placed in Graham's seat, Durbin continued:

"He was a trusted friend. My friends and family back home can't believe it when I say these things. 'You mean that Lindsey Graham?' Yes, I do. He was a good person, a valuable part of the Senate family and an extremely valuable part of this committee. I am glad that we are honoring him with this memorial today."

Graham was an unrestrained defender of US imperialist war, the persecution of immigrants and Trump's January 6, 2021 coup attempt. Durbin's praise expressed the fundamental solidarity binding the two capitalist parties together on every decisive question confronting the American ruling class.

While finding ample time to eulogize Graham, Durbin said nothing about the murders of Renée Good, Alex Pretti, Lorenzo Salgado Araujo and Johan Sebastián Guerrero, or the continuing efforts by the Department of Homeland Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Justice Department to prevent the identification and prosecution of their killers.

Every Democrat, including Durbin, likewise ignored the weaponization of the Justice Department against left-wing opponents of the Trump administration.

This includes the prosecution of the Prairieland defendants, who have received sentences totaling more than 556 years, overwhelmingly for nonviolent offenses and political activity protected by the First Amendment. The prosecution is a central component of the administration's attempt to criminalize opposition to ICE and equate left-wing, anti-capitalist and socialist politics with "terrorism."

The only senator to raise the Prairieland case was Missouri Republican Eric Schmitt, who praised Blanche for securing the monstrous sentences. "You secured 450 years in prison time for 'antifa' members involved in the terrorist attack against ICE," Schmitt declared. "That's a pretty—that's a hell of a record in 100 days," he added.

More than one hour and 15 minutes into the hearing, Klobuchar became the first Democrat to raise the recent murders of Araujo

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and Guerrero by federal agents. Even then, she framed the issue entirely as a procedural dispute over information sharing between federal and state authorities.

"When we met a few weeks ago at length, I asked you to ensure full cooperation, and I appreciated that the department shared evidence with state investigators early this week," Klobuchar said. "Will you commit to continue information sharing between federal and state investigators in these cases, as well as with regard to the recent shootings in Texas and Maine?"

Blanche replied that the investigations "should be run as every investigation of similar kinds."

In reality, the federal "investigations" have served as mechanisms for covering up the murders and shielding the agents responsible. The killers of Good, Pretti, Araujo and Guerrero remain uncharged. Federal authorities have withheld evidence, refused to identify the shooters and repeated demonstrably false claims that the victims threatened agents with their vehicles.

Nearly another hour passed before Blumenthal raised the issue. In his final question, the Connecticut Democrat asked Blanche whether he agreed "that agents of the United States should not fire into cars, fire their weapons into cars, unless there is an imminent threat."

Blumenthal did not name Araujo or Guerrero. He did not demand the identification or arrest of the agents who killed them. Nor did he call for abolishing ICE, withdrawing its agents from American cities or rescinding the tens of billions of dollars provided to the agency by Congress.

Padilla was the only Democrat who named Araujo and Guerrero. But he too demanded nothing from Blanche beyond assurances that the killings would be subjected to supposedly "independent" investigations overseen by the same state apparatus responsible for the deaths.

Not a single Democrat raised the deployment of National Guard soldiers and federal police task forces throughout major American cities. None mentioned the killing of Johnson in Memphis or demanded the withdrawal of military forces being used to occupy working class neighborhoods and major cities.

This refusal was not an oversight. The Democrats are not an opposition party. As Durbin's opening paean to Graham underscored, they are colleagues and collaborators with the Republicans in war abroad, as in Iran, and against the working class at home. They are complicit in the financial oligarchy's advanced preparations for presidential dictatorship.

The Democrats are acutely aware of the mass anger developing throughout the country against Trump's attacks on immigrants and democratic rights. Protests have continued in Houston and Maine following the murders of Araujo and Guerrero, with further demonstrations planned this weekend.

The Democrats and their adjuncts in the trade union apparatus are terrified that the demand to abolish ICE will spread throughout the working class and that workers will begin taking matters into their own hands through the methods of class struggle, including the preparation of a general strike to drive Trump's death squads out of American cities.

Seeking to divert and contain this opposition, Democratic senators concentrated most of their questioning on the proposed $1.776 billion "Anti-Weaponization Fund" for January 6 defendants and other Trump allies, the tax agreement benefiting Trump and his family, and Blanche's central role in the ongoing cover-up of the crimes of Jeffrey Epstein and his wealthy associates.

Blanche insisted that the proposed fund was "not moving forward," although the administration had not formally renounced it in writing. He also defended the settlement granting Trump and members of his family protection from certain Internal Revenue Service audits. The Department of Justice's deliberate mishandling of the Epstein files, including the exposure of information identifying victims, also dominated the hearing.

These are serious demonstrations of the criminality and corruption of the Trump administration. But under conditions of mounting state violence against immigrants, workers and left-wing protesters, their elevation above the ongoing killings and political prosecutions served to conceal the most immediate dangers confronting the working class.

Blanche is likely to secure confirmation with Republican votes. Senator Thom Tillis, previously viewed as a possible obstacle, praised Blanche on Thursday for meeting with survivors of Jeffrey Epstein's crimes. "I commend Todd Blanche for doing what all his predecessors over the last two decades never did: meet with the victims of Jeffrey Epstein's horrific crimes," Tillis wrote. "I appreciate his willingness to directly engage and listen to them."

The death of Graham has left the Judiciary Committee divided between 11 Republicans and 10 Democrats, meaning that a single Republican defection could prevent the nomination from advancing through the committee. The opposition expressed by the Democrats, however, offers no way forward. It is centered on defending the institutional prerogatives and credibility of the same Justice Department that has persecuted socialists, attacked strikers, imprisoned immigrants and defended police violence under Democratic and Republican administrations alike.

Whether or not Blanche is confirmed, the working class and all those opposed to the Trump administration must not look to the Democrats, Congress or the courts. The defense of immigrants and democratic rights requires the independent organization of workers in workplaces and neighborhoods in opposition to both capitalist parties and the trade union bureaucracy. This movement must prepare for a political general strike to halt the deportation operations, drive ICE and the National Guard out of American cities, free those imprisoned for opposing the administration and bring the federal agents responsible for these murders to justice.

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