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EDWARD EDWARDS

'Soft on Crime' Dems Dance with Political Doom

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With the surge in violent crime in cities across the nation — some breaking decades old records — law and order, public safety and crime in the streets have surpassed the COVID-19 pandemic, economic recovery and infrastructure as the issue of greatest concern to the

American public.

At the same time, the heightened worry has been accompanied by a decline in confidence that the Biden Administration can deal with it effectively, falling below 50 percent in several polls.

Despite Biden's long Senate history of support for crime crackdown legislation (a source of attacks directed at him in the primary) and despite his stated opposition to defunding police and his recently announced anti-violence program, his party's far left demands for defunding or abolishing police departments have undercut his position.

The vocal bloc of Congressional Democrats is in many ways its own worst enemy, drowning out the Administration voice, dominating the media environment with Twitter storms and threatening to become the party's face in dealing with the crime wave.

As daily reports flooded the media of mass shootings, drive-by random attacks, children cut down by stray bullets, personal disagreements settled by gunfire, the Administration struggled to develop a narrative that portrayed a recognition of the severity of the crisis and a sense of urgency to combat it.

It settled on a mix of denial, blame shifting and explanations that the double-digit percentage increase in homicides was a seasonal phenomenon and could be attributed to the aftereffects of the restrictions imposed to deal with the pandemic.

In perhaps the most far-fetched attempt at diversion, the Administration claimed the violence was a result of Trump Administration policies and, most inane of all, that it was Republicans in Congress who favored de-funding police departments.

Each day, White House press secretary Jen Psaki embarrassed herself, attempting to convince a skeptical press corps that Republicans were responsible for opposing the president's \$1.9 trillion American Rescue Plan which included funds that local governments could allocate to hire or retain police officers.

Voila! Republicans wanted to de-fund the police!

Her explanation had all the spin of a Coney Island carousel — lasting five minutes before grinding to a halt.

Cities from New York to Chicago to Los Angeles to Philadelphia to Seattle to Minneapolis to Portland were under siege but cut millions from police department budgets in response to largely left wing Democratic demands to do so.

The so-called "Squad" in the House of Representatives conducted their election campaigns on a defunding the police platform, decarceration (reducing prison populations by freeing the prisoners) and — in the most extreme cases — abolishing police departments and replacing them with social service programs.

Its putative leader, New York Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, recently suggested, for instance, that the public fear of the wave of violence was "hysteria." Others in her cadre continued to call for police budget cuts and eliminating law enforcement

agencies.

Contrast their remarks with those of a respected and towering figure, House Majority Whip James Clyburn of South Carolina who characterized the de-fund the police demands as “left wing foolishness.”

In a subsequent scathing takedown, Clyburn said “slogans like de-funding the police is cutting the throats of the party.”

Clyburn understands that perception is crucial, often outweighing reasonable argument. The perception created by the party’s left wing is that the spike in gun violence is overstated and has been weaponized by right wing to gain political advantage.

The party’s unexpected defeats in the 2020 Congressional elections have been widely blamed on that perception. In an election which turned a sitting President out of office, it was anticipated Democrats would build on their majority by as many as 20 seats. Instead, the party lost a dozen seats and produced the thinnest partisan majority since World War II and are within six spots of losing it altogether.

It is crucial for the Biden Administration to seize control of the narrative. It obviously is aware that murders have risen 50 percent in New York, 60 percent in Atlanta, 53 percent in Chicago, 800 percent in Portland and nearly 250 homicides were committed over the July 4 holiday weekend. The impact of those statistics is not lost on the American people.

In New Jersey, six people were killed in a dozen shootings over the holiday weekend. From January to May, 87 people were shot fatally, a 36 percent increase from last year. In addition, in the same period, 445 people were wounded by gunfire, a 68 percent increase from last year.

After two recent exchanges of gunfire in broad daylight in tourist heavy Times Square, and 51 shootings in New York state over the holiday weekend, Gov. Andrew Cuomo clearly had enough: He issued the first in the nation executive order declaring gun violence a disaster emergency.

New York City Democratic voters obviously share the governor’s view, choosing Brooklyn Borough President and retired city police captain Eric Adams as the party’s mayoral candidate in a campaign decided largely on the crime issue.

Many of the cities that experienced the crime increase but reduced spending on law enforcement despite it have now re-thought their actions and restored funding.

Others have suffered as dozens of seasoned officers retired or resigned in the face of what they felt was a lack of support and had been singled out as responsible for the violence.

Unless the president and Democratic congressional leaders respond more vigorously, the voices of the de-fund the police crowd will continue to influence the debate and not for the better.

Staring at the 2022 midterm elections, there will be a serious political price to pay if the “soft on crime” accusations sure to be at the center of Republican strategy stick.

Congressman Clyburn seems to be the leading Democrat who understands fully the peril posed by the perception that the party appears out of step with the national mood.

A majority of the country across all demographic and political lines oppose de-funding the police by wide margins.

Continued denial is not an option. Nor are convoluted rationales which crumble under the weight of public skepticism.

If the president and his party ask the American people who they believe, them or their eyes, they will not like the answer.

Carl Golden is a senior contributing analyst with the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.