

Rep. Bowen: Statement on vigilante murders in Kenosha

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- In response to the murder of two protesters at the hands of a member of an armed militia, State Rep. David Bowen (D-Milwaukee) released the following statement:

“Protesters have taken to the streets in Kenosha to demand accountability from law enforcement and an end to police violence against Black and Brown communities, most recently highlighted once again by the shooting of Jacob Blake, an unarmed Black man who was shot seven times in the back by a Kenosha police officer. What we saw last night was an escalation into deadly violence provoked by armed white supremacists who have shown that their only objective was to menace, maim, and murder under the guise of ‘protecting property.’ Despite the fact that these armed ‘militia’ members had broadcast an intention to harm protesters online, instead of being questioned or arrested by police, these armed vigilantes were allowed to roam the streets freely, leading to the murder of two protesters and injuries to another. I was in Kenosha last night to observe the protests, and I saw firsthand these armed agitators provoking the crowd, damaging cars, and generally intensifying the situation, all while police officers stood by and let it happen.”

Last night in Kenosha, armed ‘militia’ members, including a white 17-year-old from Antioch, Illinois were seen joking around with law enforcement, even receiving water from them as they expressed their “appreciation” for their presence. Later that night, the Illinois man fatally shot one protester in the head and, while attempting to flee the scene of that murder, was swarmed by protesters who attempted to disarm him. In response, the armed man opened fire on protesters once again, killing a second individual and seriously

injuring a third. Even though this active shooting occurred just down the street from numerous law enforcement officers, and even though the gunman attempted to turn himself in to police, the police officers present did not attempt to either question or arrest this clear threat to public safety, instead letting him walk free. It wasn't until this morning that the murderer was finally apprehended, after having fled Wisconsin and returned to his hometown in Illinois. He faces charges of first-degree intentional homicide, and has an extradition hearing scheduled later this week.

“The police’s complicity in allowing heavily armed militias to patrol the streets in a volatile situation only shows that their aim was not to de-escalate the situation, but instead to allow protesters to become the targets of these groups who clearly have violent intentions. This shows what we have seen time and again: law enforcement in Wisconsin and across the country lack the skills and intention necessary to de-escalate potentially deadly interactions, and often actually escalate these tense situations. Law enforcement must end the targeting of protesters and focus on these violent white supremacist groups before more people are murdered. If the police aren’t going to work to protect people from literal murderers, what is the point of having them around in the first place?”

As I have said before, this moment proves that it is time for ACTION: Legislative Republican leaders must stop ignoring the cry of the protesters, and must move without further delay to pass meaningful policy change that will uplift and invest in our communities, prioritize healing and justice, and ensure that law enforcement officers who put the safety of the public in danger face consequences for their actions. Only then can our communities truly begin the difficult but necessary process of healing.”