

House Republicans want to defund the police

Eugene Robinson : 5-6 minutes : 3/7/2024

For their next trick, House Republicans have decided to [defund the police](#). Democrats should call them on it, and anyone who cares about law enforcement should be outraged.

The [spending package](#) pushed through the House on Wednesday by Speaker Mike Johnson (R-La.) cuts the FBI's operating budget by 6 percent, siphoning much-needed resources away from the nation's premier police agency. And the measure cuts funding for the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) — which, among other roles, is instrumental in battling gun violence and terrorism — by 7 percent.

So much for all of [the GOP's "back the blue" hot air](#). Republicans are determined to reduce the federal government's ability to fight crime and make our communities safer.



I realize that irony left the building ages ago, but this really is rich. During the uproar [that followed the murder of George Floyd](#) by a Minneapolis police officer, Republicans loudly — and falsely — accused the Democratic Party of [wanting to “defund the police.”](#) No matter how explicitly leaders such as [Joe Biden](#) and Nancy Pelosi made clear that the party wanted no such thing, Republicans persisted in trying to hang an anti-law enforcement sign [around Democrats’ necks.](#)

Led by [Donald Trump](#), the GOP continues to paint cities run by Democrats as riddled with [violent crime](#) and general lawlessness — hellscape where police are denied the resources and support they need to keep law-abiding citizens safe.

But if you look past what Republicans say to what they do, it’s the GOP that is literally taking steps to defund law enforcement. Johnson and his far-right majority in the House evidently care far less about preventing and punishing crime than they care about ideology. And, of course, [about pleasing Trump.](#)

In a [statement](#), the House Appropriations Committee boasted that the spending bill “utilizes the power of the purse to address the weaponization of the growing bureaucracy within the FBI and ATF,” both of which are part of the Justice Department.

The key word there is [“weaponization.”](#) It is an article of faith among MAGA true believers that the Justice Department is being “weaponized” against Trump — and also, more broadly, against conservatives, Christians, gun owners, [Trump voters](#) and the “tourists” who engaged in [“legitimate political discourse”](#) by violently smashing their way into the Capitol on [Jan. 6, 2021](#), and trying to overturn the result of the 2020 election.

It was [FBI agents](#), after all, who executed a search warrant at [Trump’s Mar-a-Lago estate](#) and seized boxes of highly classified documents that the former president had refused to return for more than a year, [despite numerous polite requests.](#)

The Justice Department, under [Attorney General Merrick Garland](#), authorized that search. And Garland [appointed the independent special counsel](#), Jack Smith, who sought and obtained [grand jury indictments against Trump](#) for hoarding those classified documents and also [for his alleged role](#) in the Jan. 6 insurrection.

Since [Trump is the emperor](#) of his party and since he desperately wants to escape being held accountable, the GOP can’t be the law-and-order party anymore. The House has decided to punish the FBI to keep Trump happy and advance the false narrative that he’s being persecuted. In addition to slashing the bureau’s operating budget, the House also cut the FBI’s construction account by 95 percent — at a time when the bureau is trying to replace its outdated headquarters building.

ATF is being punished for insulting the GOP’s shoot-’em-up ideology by playing a role in enforcing the nation’s gun laws and by [compiling statistics on crimes committed](#) with firearms.

Both agencies provide much-needed support to local and state police departments across the country. The next time a mass shooting occurs in some deep-red congressional district, I confidently predict that the relevant Republican member of the House will rush to the scene and thank the FBI and ATF for their assistance — after having voted to limit the agencies’ capacity.

Under Johnson’s leadership, depriving law enforcement of funding is becoming a habit. The [bipartisan agreement on border policy](#), negotiated by one of the most conservative Republicans in the Senate, would have provided new resources to help U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents interdict illegal crossings, alleviate a humanitarian crisis and stem the influx of illegal drugs such as fentanyl. But Johnson refuses to bring the bill to the House floor.

Democrats campaigning should make Republicans own all of this if they want to take back control of the House in the fall. It is indeed true that one of our two major parties is taking concrete action to defund the police. That party happens to be the GOP.