



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on February 18, 2023

New Oregon Bill Would Crack Down on Paramilitary Activity

Memories from 2020's "Summer of Love" are still fresh in the minds of many Americans. Many people from both sides of the political aisle would be happy to see authorities crack down on lawbreaking anarchists from the "other side."

But are new attempts to restrict the activities of "paramilitary" groups the answer? Or would this simply give more control to the government while making "We the People" more vulnerable?

These are the questions raised by proposed legislation being debated in Oregon, which amid the George Floyd riots became the country's epicenter of political violence, the site of viral video displaying black-clad Antifa clashing with police or with Proud Boys.



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As the [Associated Press](#) reports, the new bill would provide a unique solution to political violence by creating a civil remedy by which Oregonians would be able to sue paramilitary members who interfere with or intimidate those engaged in an activity they have a legal right to, such as voting.

In addition, under the plan, a court would have the power to block paramilitary members from pursuing an activity if the state's attorney general thought it would constitute illegal action.

As it stands, all 50 states in the union currently ban private paramilitary organizations and militias. The Oregon bill would take the next step by adding a civil component to the issue.

In essence, it would be similar to a 2021 Texas law that allows citizens to file lawsuits against anyone who participates in an abortion, or a Missouri law that empowers people to sue police officers who enforce federal gun control laws.

The bill's sponsor, Democrat Representative Dacia Grayber, said her proposal "would make it harder for private paramilitaries to operate with impunity throughout Oregon, regardless of their ideology."

But conservative Oregonians have come out in droves to express their concern that Grayber's plan would trample on the freedom of assembly while allowing the government to target right-wingers while letting leftist groups like Antifa and Black Lives Matter walk free.

The definition of being "armed" and of "paramilitary group" are just two of the important questions that lawmakers are grappling to resolve.

Carson Whitehead, an attorney with the Oregon Department of Justice, assured that the legislation would not infringe on Oregonians' right to open carry. Rather, he said that if a paramilitary group went to a park, for example, having the knowledge that their presence would be intimidating, then those who



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were intimidated would be able to sue for damages.

“This particular bill is not directed at individuals open-carrying. This is directed at armed, coordinated paramilitary activity,” stated Mary McCord, an expert on terrorism and domestic extremism. McCord is the executive director of Georgetown University Law Center’s Institute for Constitutional Advocacy and Protection and is helping to craft the bill.

Representative Rick Lewis, a Republican, asked during a committee hearing for the bill’s consideration whether frozen water bottles and rocks — two of Antifa’s favorite weapons to deploy against police — would classify as being “armed” under the proposal.

According to Kimberly McCullough, Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum’s legislative director, the answer is “yes,” because rocks and frozen water bottles can cause serious injury or death.

Multnomah County District Attorney Mike Schmidt, who has Portland within his jurisdiction, is a proponent of the bill.

“Our current inability to get upstream of this violence before it starts leaves us vulnerable to organized criminal elements who enter into a protest environment with the express intention of escalating the situation into an assault or arson or a riot,” Schmidt said.

Oregon isn’t the only state in which lawmakers are moving to restrict paramilitary activity.

As AP notes:

On the other side of the country in Vermont, a bill making it a crime to operate a paramilitary training camp got final approval from the state Senate on Friday. The measure, which senators earlier approved by a 29-1 vote, also allows state prosecutors to seek an injunction to close such a facility.

“This bill gives the state the authority it needs to protect Vermonters from fringe actors looking to create civil disorder,” said state Sen. Philip Baruth, a Democrat and Progressive from Burlington.

Baruth introduced the measure in response to a firearms training facility built without permits in the town of Pawlet. Neighbors frequently complained about gunfire coming from the Slate Ridge facility, calling it a menace. Baruth’s bill now goes to the Vermont House.

Over the course of the last decade, Oregon has had the sixth-highest number of extremist incidents in America, even though it’s 27th in the nation in terms of population. It has been the site of an armed takeover of a federal wildlife refuge and attacks on federal buildings.

Yet in the end, the question remains: Can Oregonians trust that this bill won’t, if passed, do more harm than good? That it won’t be used to target constitutionalists and the law-abiding while authorities turn a blind eye to left-wing anarchists?

When it’s a choice between freedom and safety, it has often been the case throughout history that choosing safety results in the loss of both.



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