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Congress of the United States
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Washington, DC 20515

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NORTH AFRICA, AND INTERNATIONAL
TERRORISM

SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT
AND INVESTIGATIONS

June 3, 2020

William Barr
Attorney General
United States Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530

Attorney General Barr,

Two nights ago, I watched as police officers used flashbangs, tear gas, and rubber munitions against a peaceful protest across the street from the White House. Hundreds of law-abiding American citizens had gathered to protest the murder of George Floyd, an unarmed African American who died last week in Minneapolis under the knee of a police officer.

I could not understand why such aggressive tactics were being used – a whole 30 minutes before the District of Columbia’s curfew was set to go into effect – until I saw the President, yourself, and several senior White House officials walk through the site of the protest to film a cynical, political propaganda video that the White House later released through social media.

The use of these measures for such a contemptuous purpose would be reason for condemnation on its own. However, the Washington Post reported yesterday that you yourself were responsible for this reprehensible display.

As you know, the First Amendment to the Constitution guarantees “the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.” This appears to have been violated given the fact that no order to disperse was issued, no violence had been reported, and it was still 30 minutes before curfew.

The Supreme Court has held that “expression on public issues ‘has always rested on the highest rung of the hierarchy of First Amendment values’” (NAACP v. Claiborne Hardware Co.), and that “debate on public issues should be uninhibited, robust, and wide-open” (New York Times Co. v. Sullivan).

Given the issues at stake, and your evident role in suppressing the right of the American people to redress their grievances, it is clear that a special prosecutor must be appointed to investigate your actions and the actions of all executive branch officials involved in this action.

I look forward to your prompt response.

Sincerely,

David N. Cicilline
Member of Congress