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Cops ‘at the breaking point’ turned their backs on Lightfoot, alderman says

“Our police officers have been under siege, under-appreciated and thrown under the bus for the last year and a half,” said Ald. Matt O’Shea, whose 19th Ward on the Far Southwest Side is home to scores of police officers.

By Fran Spielman | Aug 9, 2021, 2:34pm CDT



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Flags were at half-staff outside Chicago Police Department headquarters on Monday as the city mourned the loss of Officer Ella French, who was fatally shot Saturday during a traffic stop. | Ashlee Rezin/Sun-Times

Chicago Police officers **turned their backs to Mayor Lori Lightfoot** because they are “at the breaking point” and believe “leadership across this country, across this city do not have their back,” an influential alderman said Monday.

Ald. Matt O’Shea (19th) is Lightfoot’s hand-picked chairman of the City Council’s Aviation Committee. It was a reward for his runoff endorsement of the mayor, which helped pave the way for her landslide victory over County Board President Toni Preckwinkle.

O’Shea also represents a Far Southwest Side ward where scores of police officers live.

That’s why he was not at all surprised by the cold shoulder Lightfoot got Saturday night from rank-and-file officers gathered on the 7th floor of the University of Chicago Hospital after the fatal shooting of Officer Ella French.

The officers were there to pray for French, 29, who was shot and killed during a traffic stop in West Englewood, and for her critically-wounded partner, **still fighting for his life**.

“They’re at a breaking point. Clearly, our police officers have been under siege, under-appreciated and thrown under the bus for the last year and a half. They feel — and rightfully so — that leadership across this country, across this city do not have their back,” O’Shea told the Sun-Times.

“Anybody who was working Saturday night as those calls came over the radio and they learned of what had happened to their colleagues — that’s a tipping point. And it’s a tipping point that many of us have been waiting to happen as the unbelievable violence we see in communities all across this city, where criminals have absolutely no regard for human life, no fear of the consequences of their actions. To shoot at point-blank range two Chicago police officers. We are a city in crisis.”

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O'Shea was asked what message Lightfoot should get from the show of disrespect by rank-and-file officers and the tongue-lashing the father of the wounded cop gave her at the hospital.

“I would hope she gets an understanding that police officers across this city feel that leadership does not have their back. That’s what I’m hearing. That’s what I’ve been hearing for a long time,” the alderman said.

Noting that West Englewood residents assisted police officers in apprehending two of the suspects, O'Shea said: “The majority of people in this city support the police, want to see something done to send this pendulum back the other way. They’re sick and tired of the violence. Sick and tired of innocent children being murdered.”

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Far Northwest Side Ald. Anthony Napolitano (41st) has served the city as both a Chicago police officer and firefighter.

Like O'Shea, his constituents include scores of police officers.

Napolitano has clashed repeatedly with Lightfoot on police reform issues, most recently on the issue of civilian oversight.

But he does not believe the mayor alone wears the jacket for what happened to French and her partner.

“I never saw her as an anti-police advocate. But I will put this 550 percent on these socialists and these progressives in the City Council. This blood is on their hands, without a doubt,” Napolitano said.

“They’re the ones who created this whole anti-police movement that has made these brazen acts of violence against police officers [possible] — 39 this year alone. This is

created by them. This whole defund and disrespect movement that they have started. These pieces of s--t are the ones that created this and talk anti-police. And they're the ones begging for more police in their communities. They're the biggest hypocrites. They disgust me."

Mourning bunting hangs at Chicago Police Department headquarters on Monday. Officer Ella French, 29, was fatally shot Saturday during a traffic stop in West Englewood. Ashlee Rezin/Sun-Times

Ald. Nick Sposato (38th) is a former Chicago firefighter whose Northwest Side ward is home to scores of Chicago Police officers. He's one of the rank-and-file's biggest defenders in the Council.

Sposato said the show of disrespect Lightfoot got from cops who are "hurting," was understandable, but also "disappointing" and unjustified.

"People want to play the blame game. I don't blame anybody for this. It's the time and the culture," Sposato said.

“I know first-hand that the mayor is not anti-police. I know what she tells me. Sometimes, maybe, she doesn’t show it as well in public.”

Although the unprecedented show of disrespect was directed at Lightfoot, Sposato said crime-weary Chicagoans are “mad at all politicians.”

“It’s not just her. It’s probably 45 of the aldermen. It’s the state’s attorney. It’s the chief judge. ... If you’re an elected [official], you’re to blame because [of] this whole cancel culture and the lack of support by electeds for police officers. It’s not just in Chicago. It’s all over the place,” Sposato said.

“Two or three aldermen are always supporting the police. Some of ’em don’t bash the police, but they sort of sit on their hands. And some of the Commies are just constantly bashing the police and saying bad things about ’em and want to defund ’em. And we get lumped in with the rest of them.”

Public Safety Committee Chairman Chris Taliaferro (29th) called the cold shoulder that Lightfoot received “unfortunate,” “tragic” and unwarranted.

“I do not agree,” Taliaferro said.

“We can’t let that be our focus. We just can’t. You have a young lady 29 years old with only three years of service on the police department. That has to be our focus rather than on sensationalizing what might have happened at the hospital.”

A Chicago police procession drives by the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office early Sunday morning. The procession was in honor of Officer Ella French, who was shot and killed during a traffic stop in West Englewood Saturday night. Tyler LaRiviere/Sun-Times

Fraternal Order of Police President John Catanzara has clashed with Lightfoot over all manner of law enforcement issues.

Catanzara said the mayor could easily have avoided the hospital confrontation.

“She was told, ‘Don’t come upstairs’ several times. I know that because I was downstairs in the E.R. when her people were told that the family did not want her upstairs. And she went up there anyway,” Catanzara said.

The father “expressed his views,” Catanzara said, telling the mayor she was to blame.

Catanzara couldn't agree more. State's Attorney Kim Foxx is “not the only problem here.” Lightfoot is equally to blame, he said.

“From no vehicle chases at all under any circumstances pretty much to ... 13 pages of a

foot chase policy — that’s all on the mayor. It’s stupid. And she’s been vilifying the police for two-and-a-half years now,” Catanzara said.

“Now, all of the sudden, she’s having a come-to-Jesus moment because she’s got John O’Malley as her deputy mayor? Nice enough dude, but enough is enough. Nobody’s buying it. She can say whatever the hell she wants and look like a hero. But she’s full of s--t.”

The mayor’s office issued a statement saying Lightfoot is singularly focused on “healing the wounds” and would “reject any and all [who] try to use this moment to drive further divisions in our city.”

“This is an extremely difficult and heartbreaking time for the Chicago Police Department, and for our entire city. The Mayor was present at the emergency room to offer support and condolences to the families involved and the hundreds of line officers and exempts who were there, which she did. In a time of tragedy, emotions run high and that is to be expected,” the statement said.

“The Mayor spoke to a range of officers that tragic night and sensed the overwhelming sentiment was about concern for their fallen colleagues. As the Mayor stated [Sunday], now is not the time for divisive and toxic rhetoric or reporting. This is a time for us to come together as a city. We have a common enemy and it is the conditions that breed the violence and the manifestations of violence, namely illegal guns, and gangs.”

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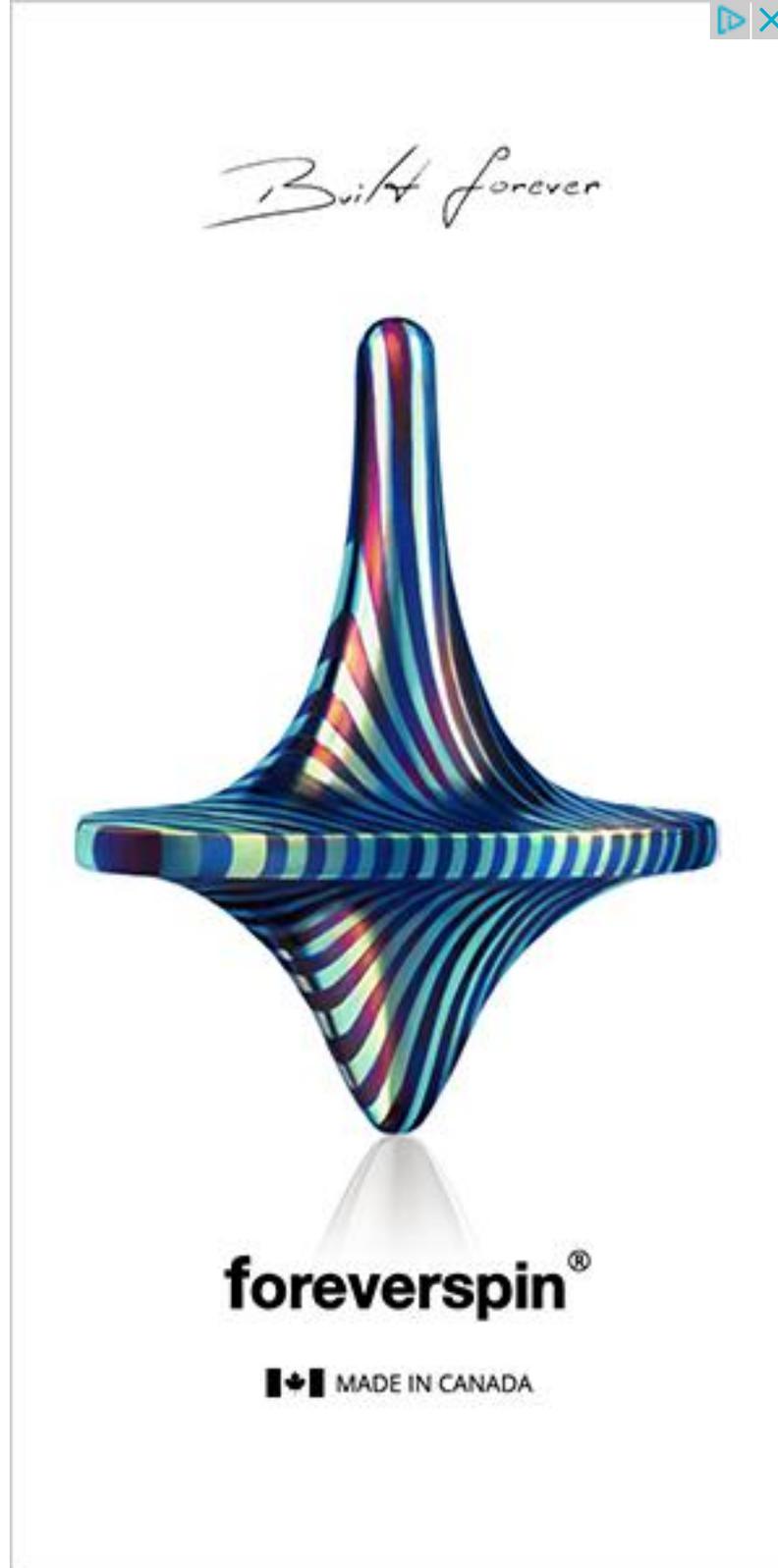
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