

No letup in Trump's war on immigrants as 37-year-old Mexican man dies in ICE custody

By Kevin Martinez
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There has been no letup in President Donald Trump's attacks on immigrants as evidenced by multiple news reports of various atrocities at the US southern border. The recent Supreme Court ruling effectively eliminating the right to asylum is but the latest and sharpest expression of these attacks.

Despite the overwhelming popular hostility to Trump's policies, the anti-immigrant assault continues only because of the complicity of the Democratic Party. This week's debate of Democratic candidates saw many hypocritical and lying displays of sympathy towards immigrants, but not one candidate could concretely say how they would act any differently from Trump or his predecessor Barack Obama, who deported more immigrants than any other president in history.

Below is a small sample of the ongoing war on the most vulnerable sections of the working class in the United States.

Mexican man dies in ICE custody

A 37-year-old Mexican man died in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) custody on Tuesday. The man was identified as Roberto Rodriguez-Espinoza and the preliminary cause of death was subdural hematoma, bleeding in the brain which can be caused by prolonged alcohol abuse or severe head trauma. His passing was the eighth acknowledged death in US custody this fiscal year.

Rodriguez-Espinoza was in ICE custody since September 3 at the McHenry County Adult Correctional Facility in Woodstock, Illinois. According to ICE, Rodriguez-Espinoza had admitted to a history of alcohol consumption, was "acting confused" during his intake screening and was taken to Northwestern Medicine Woodstock Hospital, where his brain hemorrhage was diagnosed.

Mexican man hospitalized after being shot by ICE agents in front of Nashville, Tennessee supermarket

A 39-year-old Mexican national was sent to the hospital after being shot twice by ICE officers outside of a Nashville grocery store. The incident began last Thursday after agents tried to pull the man over during a traffic stop. The local police were not aware of a warrant out for the man's arrest.

The man was shot in the elbow and stomach and underwent surgery. He surrendered to FBI agents after leaving the hospital.

ICE claimed the man had an arrest history, but details were not disclosed by the agency. The Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition stated, "ICE was trying to separate a man from his family yesterday, but they could have killed him. We are relieved that the day ended without further violence and that the man was able to receive life-saving medical care."

The Democratic mayor of Nashville, David Briley, who recently signed an executive order to override a state law banning sanctuary cities, released a statement raising concerns over the disorderly character of the detention, remarking, "This is exactly what we don't want happening in our city."

An attorney for the family of the undocumented man, Andrew Free, said, "The FBI informed me that if there had been sufficient evidence to charge him when he surrendered he would've been arrested."

In a surveillance video obtained by local media, a truck driven by the immigrant man can be seen parked in a lot when a white pickup truck with flashing lights pulls up. He drives off and officers are then seen chasing after the truck.

The man has since been charged with assaulting an ICE officer. Mary Kathryn Harcombe, legal director with the Tennessee Immigrant and Refugee Rights Coalition, told the media, "In a criminal case, there has to be a certain amount of proof before a suspect can be arrested and charged with a crime," adding, "In their investigation, the FBI agents simply did not find enough proof to support the ICE officers' claim that the man assaulted them before they shot him."

Republican Governor Bill Lee urged his state to "recognize we're a country of laws and we must abide by that." In addition to the shooting, ICE has also been involved in raids at local meat-processing plants and is reportedly being helped by Nashville's probation services to track down immigrants.

Significantly, Nashville was the site of an incident in July in which residents of the working class Hermitage neighborhood came together to defend an immigrant father and his son and block ICE agents from arresting them.

US sends pregnant Salvadoran woman having contractions back to Mexico

A Salvadoran woman who was eight and a half months pregnant and having contractions was detained by US border patrol after crossing the Rio Grande and forced back into Mexico. Agents took her to a hospital where doctors gave her drugs to stop the contractions and immediately afterwards sent her back.

The woman had been waiting with her three-year-old daughter in a makeshift camp in Matamoros. According to her attorney Jodi Goodwin, “She’s concerned about having the baby in the street or having to have the baby in a shelter.”

The woman now joins more than 38,000 people who are waiting in Mexico for their asylum claims to play out in the US. In the state of Tamaulipas across from south Texas, where the mother is waiting for a November court date, many of the shelters are at or above full capacity forcing many immigrants to sleep in tents or on blankets. There are many reports of migrants being harassed or kidnapped in the border cities.

Pregnant women are not automatically exempt from the Trump administration’s Remain in Mexico policy. The so-called Migrant Protection Protocols are being used to deter immigrants from crossing the border. The government of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has carried out Trump’s policy by stopping immigrants en route to the US after the White House threatened the country with crippling tariffs last June.

Although the Department of Homeland Security ostensibly makes exemptions for “vulnerable populations” to be exempt from being sent back to Mexico, US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) has declared that being pregnant “may not in and of itself disqualify an individual from being amenable for the program.”

While the CBP undoubtedly knew the 28-year-old mother was pregnant when they took her to the hospital and sent her back into Mexico, they have so far refused to comment on the case.

Houston man who invited ICE to a community meeting now faces deportation

Roland Gramajo, a 40-year-old businessman from Houston and respected member of the local Guatemalan community, invited activists from across the country, members of Congress and ICE officials to a series of meetings he helped organize to calm down residents about immigration raids.

Three weeks after the meeting, Gramajo was arrested near his home, shocking his family and forcing many to wonder if his community forums with ICE were to blame. There were reports from the August 18 meeting that three suspicious men were taking pictures of Gramajo. In a statement, ICE said they had not sent any officials to the meeting “in any capacity—official or unofficial.”

Gramajo’s arrest is part of a disturbing pattern whereby the Trump administration is deliberately targeting political activists as in the case of Ravi Ragbir, a New York-based immigration rights advocate who was detained last year.

Born in Guatemala, Gramajo came to the US in 1994 on a tourist visa. In December 1998 he pleaded guilty to a misdemeanor charge, vehicle burglary, which stemmed from an episode which was intended as a practical joke against a friend who wanted the charges dropped. The case proceeded anyway.

In June 2004, Gramajo was deported but some months later crossed back into the US illegally to be with his family. Family members told the media how their father would gather bicycles and toys for families in need, helped immigrants with translation services and securing loans, and organized mental health outreach services.

In January 2018 the Houston City Council passed a resolution commending Gramajo, stating he was “a very well-known community activist whose qualities represent a true leader with an exceptional drive to improve the quality of life throughout the diversity community in Houston and he is an extremely positive role model who is dedicated to serving and inspiring the community to get involved.”

Katherine Gramajo, his daughter, says she advised her dad not to organize the community meeting, telling media, “I told him not to. He just wanted to get the word across to the Latino community that they’re not all bad people.”

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