

Hillary Clinton joins right-wing attack on “sanctuary cities”

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In her first national television interview in a year, Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton attacked the longstanding “sanctuary city” policy of the city of San Francisco, which limits local police collaboration with the federal Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

Clinton joined with her Republican presidential rivals, as well as California’s two Democratic US senators, in condemning San Francisco for releasing an undocumented immigrant, 56-year-old Juan Francisco Lopez-Sanchez, from the local jail. Lopez-Sanchez then allegedly shot and killed 32-year-old Kathryn Steinle as she was strolling near the Ferry Building on the San Francisco waterfront.

The Steinle case has become a media sensation, flogged endlessly by Fox News and other cable outlets as an example of criminality by “illegal aliens.” Billionaire Donald Trump cited the killing as proof of his claim, made at the launching of his Republican presidential campaign last month, that immigrants from Mexico are criminals and rapists.

The circumstances of the case are murky, to say the least. Lopez-Sanchez had no apparent motive to kill Steinle. There was no attempted holdup or assault, and he did not accost the young woman, who was walking with her father and a friend. After his arrest, Lopez-Sanchez reportedly admitted to the shooting but said he found a gun on the street and it went off accidentally. Police have confirmed that the gun that fired the fatal shots belonged to a federal agent, but provided no explanation of how it came to be in the possession of Lopez-Sanchez.

How Lopez-Sanchez came to be released is also in dispute. He had completed a four-year sentence on a conviction for illegally entering the United States after a previous deportation. The federal Bureau of Prisons

transferred him to San Francisco city jail on an outstanding warrant for drug possession, but the local prosecutor decided that the 20-year-old charge would not stand up in court, and had it dismissed.

At that point, several months ago, there was no legal basis for holding Lopez-Sanchez, and he was released from jail. It is not even clear whether this was the product of San Francisco’s “sanctuary city” policy or an instance of miscommunication.

The term “sanctuary city” refers to policies adopted by more than 300 cities and counties nationwide, limiting the role of local police in enforcing immigration laws. Some cities bar local police from asking people they detain about their immigration status, while other ordinances go further and restrict actions by local police in responding to requests from federal immigration authorities.

San Francisco adopted its first ordinance in this area in 1989, banning use of city funds to pay for immigration enforcement by local police. Under a subsequent ordinance, adopted in reaction to stepped-up deportations under the Obama administration, San Francisco police take action on detention requests from federal immigration authorities only in response to a court order or arrest warrant.

Given Lopez-Sanchez’s lengthy criminal record, the ICE would have had no difficulty obtaining a warrant for his arrest and deportation. The federal agency claims that it was never notified of Lopez-Sanchez’s release, and so took no action to gain custody. Without the necessary warrant, Sheriff Ross Mirkarimi said there was no alternative but to release the prisoner.

None of these details are of any concern to the political reactionaries and media blowhards who have begun sounding off on the Steinle case—among them, the frontrunner for the Democratic presidential

nomination.

In an interview conducted in Iowa City, Iowa, Clinton criticized Donald Trump for his anti-Mexican comments, and said that all the Republican candidates were more or less hostile to immigrants, opposing any path to citizenship.

CNN reporter Brianna Keilar pointed to Clinton's past support for "sanctuary city" policies, during the 2008 campaign, and raised the Steinle killing. Clinton replied that San Francisco "made a mistake not to deport someone that the federal government strongly felt should be deported."

"What should be done is any city should listen to the Department of Homeland Security, which as I understand it, urged them to deport this man again after he got out of prison another time," Clinton continued. "So I have absolutely no support for a city that ignores the strong evidence that should be acted on."

Clinton has held numerous campaign events to highlight her supposed sympathy for the problems of immigrant workers, even professing to support citizenship rights for undocumented immigrants who have lived in the US for a certain number of years. But as soon as the media furor arose over the Steinle case, she jumped on the immigrant-bashing bandwagon.



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