

California: Car plows through immigration protesters outside US congressman's office

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A car drove into union-sponsored immigration protesters outside of GOP Representative Ed Royce's office in the Los Angeles suburb of Brea last Thursday afternoon. The driver, 56-year-old Daniel Wenzek, was arrested on suspicion of assault with a deadly weapon. He has since been released from custody pending investigation.

Widely shared video of the incident shows Wenzek inching his car into protesters who had temporarily blocked a street crossing while walking across it. As more protesters gathered around screaming at him to stop, Wenzek accelerated while a protester lay on the hood of his car. Wenzek finally stopped his car approximately 50 feet into the intersection after running into a handful of police officers there to monitor the protest (Video of the incident can be found [here](#)).

While authorities have not determined how many protesters were injured as a result of the incident, SEIU United Workers West president David Huerta says four members and two staffers were taken to the hospital for evaluations.

The incident recalls the killing of 32-year-old Heather Heyer in Charlottesville, Virginia last August. Heyer was hit by a car and killed by a 20-year-old Hitler admirer from Ohio, part of an extra-constitutional fascist movement being cultivated by the Trump administration and the president's former chief strategist Steve Bannon.

While there were no fatalities reported after the Brea incident, the social media postings of Wenzek along with his overall personal history suggests a psychologically troubled individual with strong sympathies for the "alt-right" movement that inspired the Charlottesville killer.

He is reportedly a registered sex offender, having served a three-year prison sentence for an act he committed against a child under 14 years of age in 2006. After his release from prison in 2009, Wenzek became a born-again Christian and would regularly post Bible verses on his

Facebook page.

More recently, Wenzek released posts criticizing Barack Obama for what he perceived to be the latter's "socialism" and became a devotee of the right-wing Breitbart news web site. Wenzek specifically lamented the passing of Breitbart founder Andrew Breitbart in 2012. He wrote, "What a huge loss! Andrew Brietbart dies at age 43. Andrew you will be missed by millions of Americans who love this country. May God bless your wife and children."

Wenzek also reportedly had difficulty maintaining employment as a result of his sex offender status, which was a source of frustration for him.

After his release Thursday, Wenzek posted messages on a friend's Facebook page. "I see I made the news," he wrote. "Too bad they didn't show the whole video. They only showed where I'm trying to get away for fear from my life. And it was not an immigrant march they had signs SEIU."

If the protesters were in any way a source of fear for Wenzek, the same could not be said for cops on the scene. After angry marchers were cleared away after his car finally stopped, video shows Wenzek being gently led away from his car by police. Based on that video footage, Wenzel was not handcuffed for at least the first 51 seconds after emerging from his car. During that time, he was not even physically touched by the police with the exception of a few reassuring taps on the shoulder.

By contrast, one angry protester who jumped on Wenzek's car immediately after the incident was viciously thrown to the ground by officers.

The protest event itself was only meant to serve as the usual scripted fare served up by the trade unions. Permits had been obtained from the city of Brea for the march and a news conference had taken place in downtown Los Angeles earlier that morning.

A delivery was then attempted to Congressman Royce's

office containing personal appeals by union members to keep the Temporary Protected Status for immigrants (TPS) program intact. Royce himself was traveling and the expected refusal of these letters became the pretext for the pre-planned march outside.

The protesters, associated with the Unite Here, SEIU and several other trade unions, were gathered outside of Royce's office to support the preservation of the TPS program. TPS, enacted in 1990, applies to immigrants from certain countries in which deportation would imperil the immigrants' safety. The list of such countries is determined by the Department of Homeland Security.

The protest was made in advance of looming deadlines for the Trump administration to recertify TPS status for several Central American Countries. These include Honduras and Nicaragua on November 5, Haiti by November 23 and El Salvador by January 8. The DHS recently terminated TPS for Sudan, prompting worries that a similar fate is in store for other TPS countries.

More than 300,000 foreign nationals covered by the TPS program currently live in the United States with the largest number—195,000—from El Salvador.

The TPS deadline arrives on the heels of the Trump administration's repeal of the DACA program along with a massive crackdown on immigration generally. The DACA program, enacted by the Obama administration as a cover for its mass deportation of more than 3 million immigrants, provides a temporary reprieve from deportation for children of undocumented workers.

Under the terms of the DACA repeal, no new applications will be processed by the Department of Immigration while DACA status itself will be repealed on March 8, 2018, with the exception of some recipients who applied for a temporary extension by October 5.

ICE raids are also expected to escalate in advance of the March termination date. ICE acting director Thomas Homan announced earlier this month that agents will launch a series of raids in the state of California, which had previously declared itself a sanctuary state, meaning that local police would not request immigration status of suspects during routine operations.

California has the largest population of immigrants of any state in the country. According to the American Immigration Council, as of 2015 one in four residents is an immigrant, while one in four is a native-born US citizen with at least one immigrant parent. This means that half of the state's population is either an immigrant or a child of an immigrant. Moreover, 2.4 million were undocumented while 4.7 million state residents lived with

at least one undocumented family member.

According to figures compiled by the Migration Policy Institute, 20,000 teachers nationwide were DACA-eligible in 2016. The loss of even a tenth of these would have a catastrophic impact on pre-college education nationwide following years of budget cutting and layoffs.

The Democrats, along with their supporters in the trade unions, are in no way opposed to the Trump administration's attack on immigrants. More undocumented immigrants, nearly 3 million, were deported by the Obama administration than any other administration. Moreover, this figure exceeds the total of all deportations carried out in the 20th century.

In September, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer met with Trump to discuss rescinding the DACA repeal. In exchange, the two promised to work with the president to increase immigration enforcement.

After the meeting, Schumer could barely contain his excitement at getting an audience with the billionaire reality television star. "He likes us! He likes me, anyway," Schumer enthused. "I said, 'Mr. President, you are much better off if you can sometimes step right and sometimes step left. If you have to step in one direction, you're boxed. He gets that.'"

Schumer speaks for a section of the ruling elite that worries that the more openly anti-immigrant policy of the Trump administration may encourage and ignite social opposition that the Democrats will no longer be able to contain.

A day after meeting with Trump, Pelosi was shouted down by protesters at a news conference in San Francisco. Expressing solidarity with undocumented workers as a whole, a few score protesters shouted that the congresswoman would not make them "bargaining chips" in her negotiations with Trump. Others shouted slogans such as, "All of us or none of us" and "Shut down ICE!"



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