

International student at University of Florida deported after traffic stop

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A demonstration was held on Wednesday by more than 90 people at the University of Florida to protest the kidnapping and deportation of student Felipe Zapata Velázquez by the Trump administration beginning on March 28.

Zapata Velázquez, from Colombia, was a third-year undergraduate student with an F-1 student visa studying food and resource economics at the University in Gainesville, Florida, when he was apprehended by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) officers.

A report by NBC Miami said bodycam footage and police records showed that Zapata Velázquez had been pulled over by law enforcement in Gainesville and was “cited for numerous offenses, including having an illegal license plate and driving with a suspended or revoked license and registration tag.”

The police video shows Zapata Velázquez telling the officer, “I’m an international student.” And then he said, “I just came from Colombia,” according to the NBC Miami report.

Police then turned the international student over to ICE officers, and he was taken to Jacksonville, where deportation proceedings were begun against him. From there, according to Colombian news channel NTN24, Zapata Velázquez was transferred to the notorious ICE Krome Detention Center in Miami-Dade on April 1, and as of late Monday, no one had heard from him.

According to the *Miami New Times*, Zapata Velázquez did not appear in ICE’s online detainee locator, and an ICE spokesperson did not respond to questions about what this means and whether he had self-deported.

Colombia NTN24 later reported that the student’s mother, Claudia Zapata Velázquez, said that her son was told he could wait in detention while the immigration court handled the case or sign his own deportation papers. At that time, she told the network, “He’s a brilliant boy; he’s an athlete. We want him to be given the opportunity to finish his degree and return to Colombia.”

In a statement in Spanish obtained and translated by NBC Miami, Zapata Velázquez said her son had in fact elected to

self-deport, and

At this time, Felipe is undergoing a physical and emotional recovery process, and we are prioritizing his well-being and overall health.

Her statement continued:

I sincerely appreciate the interest, solidarity, and support that many have expressed regarding my son’s situation. When his situation is fully clarified, and if he deems it appropriate, Felipe will personally address any additional requests or communications.

The arrest, disappearance and deportation of Felipe Zapata Velázquez is the latest case of trampling upon the fundamental rights of international students by the Trump administration and its immigration police.

In two notable cases Mahmoud Khalil, a Palestinian student at Columbia University, and Rumeysa Öztürk, a Turkish student at Tufts University, were apprehended for expressing opposition to the US government’s support for Israel’s genocide in Gaza. Momodou Taal at Cornell University was forced to leave the country after the Trump administration cancelled his student visa for protesting the Gaza genocide and filing a lawsuit seeking to block Trump’s executive orders targeting students’ free speech rights.

Khalil and Öztürk were specifically targeted by the US State Department and apprehended by plainclothes ICE officers, disappeared into unmarked vehicles and transported to an immigration detention facility in Louisiana all without being charged with any crimes.

In the case of Zapata Velázquez, he was cited for a traffic violation and essentially given the same treatment by the

Trump administration with the assistance of Republican Florida Governor Ron DeSantis. In February, DeSantis signed a new law ordering the state's 67 sheriff's offices and municipal police departments to collaborate with ICE and act as federal immigration agents with the authority to detain undocumented immigrants.

The protesters at the university's Turlington Plaza on Wednesday demanded that Zapata Velázquez be returned to the US so he can finish his studies. The demonstrators carried signs that said, "Stand with Felipe," and demanded that the university come to his defense by providing him with an immigration attorney as part of the scope of Student Legal Services.

A professor who participated in the protest spoke to the independent student newspaper, the *Alligator*, about the impact of the ICE apprehensions on students:

I know that they are feeling nervous. I'm here to support them, and also to make sure that they're safe.

The professor added that Zapata Velázquez represents international students across the US, and if this can happen to him, it can happen to anyone. He said:

We're seeing international students who have come to UF to get their education, but are scared to just share their opinion, not just here in a rally, but in the classroom.

During a panel discussion on Tuesday at the 2025 Border Security Expo in Phoenix, Arizona, acting ICE Director Todd Lyons likened his vision for mass deportations to Amazon's delivery network, calling for squads of trucks rounding up immigrants efficiently.

Lyons emphasized treating deportation as a business and incorporating artificial intelligence to expedite removals, saying:

We need to get better at treating this like a business, like (Amazon) Prime, but with human beings.

Alongside Lyons, other Trump administration officials, including Border Czar Tom Homan and Homeland Security

Secretary Kristi Noem, endorsed the use of the Alien Enemies Act to facilitate mass deportations, with Noem pledging to accelerate the process further.

In his keynote remarks at the expo, the fascist Homan spoke about outsourcing much of the deportation infrastructure to private contractors and said:

We need to buy more beds, we need more airplane flights and I know a lot of you are here for that reason.

The immigration officials addressed an audience of military and tech industry representatives, many of whom have financial ties to the Trump administration and support its attacks on immigrant workers. The event showcased major defense and security firms, including Anduril Industries and Geo Group, which have benefited from Trump's immigration policies.

Noem also defended Trump's tariffs and stated that DHS had partnered with Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) to combat "voter fraud," although there is no evidence supporting such claims. She described the border situation as a "war and an invasion," a central element of Trump's assault on democratic rights, and highlighted the use of biometrics beyond the border.

The Border Security Expo, the largest in its history, drew local and federal law enforcement, military officials, and key stakeholders in the private security sector, underscoring the relationship between the Trump administration and private corporations in pursuit of its immigration agenda.

As drastic cuts and layoffs are being made to critical social services and entire federal government departments are being shut down, massive sums are being spent on militarizing the border and building up the infrastructure of repression within the US that is aimed at suppressing the entire working class, both immigrant and native-born.



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