

# ICE agents appear in *The Pitt* episode “5:00 P.M.”—“What can we do?”

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Since our last comment on *The Pitt* January 28, the HBO Max medical drama has continued to attract large audiences, averaging roughly 12 million US viewers per episode across various platforms by mid-February, a 50 percent jump over Season 1. It has collected added honors, including a Directors Guild of America award for best direction of a drama (Amanda Marsalis) and an award for outstanding performance by an ensemble at the 2026 Actor Awards (formerly the Screen Actors Guild Awards).

An episode involving ICE agents (“5:00 P.M.”) that aired March 19 has drawn wide attention. It is another indication of the broad-based opposition to the Trump administration and its drive toward dictatorship, including its vicious anti-immigrant witch-hunt.

The series takes place in the Pittsburgh Trauma Medical Center’s emergency room (“the Pitt”). Attending physician Dr. Michael “Robby” Robinavitch (Noah Wyle) is a central figure. Over the course of the second season, Dr. Robby continues to experience a severe mental health crisis and an emotional breakdown.

It seems he has a plan to end his life on an upcoming motorcycle trip. The emotional compartmentalization Robby relies or claims to rely on is visibly failing. When one of his senior residents, Dr. Mohan (Supriya Ganesh), has a panic attack in “5:00 P.M.,” he has an outburst and belittles her in front of colleagues. In a previous episode, Dr. Al-Hashimi (Sepideh Moafi), who will replace him as department chief during his trip, faulted him for lacking “basic human empathy.”

When Dr. Mohan apologizes for a mistake she made with a patient, Dr. Robby drills into her: “This is what happens when you bring your personal life into work. Patient almost died. ... You have to think of these walls like a force field. You cannot let anything in. Your mother’s not in here. She is out there. You keep everything out there. That is the key. That is the difference between the best doctors and the ones that don’t make it.”

However sincere he may be, Robby often says one thing but does something different. The pressures are intense. His

idea of keeping his work entirely separate from his personal struggles, as well as the “outside world,” is making him a worse doctor and alienating him from colleagues, not to mention that it is pushing him to give up on life altogether.

The much anticipated ICE sequence illustrates the futility of attempting to block out the external world. While berating Dr. McKay (Fiona Dourif) for treating a homeless and xylazine-addicted young woman in a public park near the hospital (McKay is part of the “street program” and a former addict herself), Robby’s face drops as he catches sight of something behind her.

Two ICE thugs walk in with a visibly distressed and zip-tied woman Pranita (Ramona DuBarry). Their sinister masks and goon-like appearance contrast with the hospital setting, a frantic but vulnerable and caring place. The agents simply claim “she took a nasty fall” and that she “screamed in pain when we put the ties on her.” “She needs to be looked at before we process her.”

Pranita was caught up in an ICE sweep at a restaurant, and “shoved down some alley stairs.” As nurses examine her and McKay offers to call someone for Pranita, one ICE agent interjects, “No phone calls.”

The staff is visibly shaken, McKay is pleading with Robby to try to help the woman beyond her injury and Charge Nurse Dana Evans (Katherine LaNasa) whispers to him “Can’t we just tell the agents to f—k off?” “They are not gonna leave without their patient.”

Robby is laser-focused on getting Pranita treated as fast as possible to minimize the danger for everyone inside the hospital. But the effect of the ICE presence is immediate and devastating. Patients leave the waiting room in droves and so do staff members on all floors, as soon as word gets around.

Robby, frustrated, walks up to an ICE agent lingering around the reception area.

You know patients come in here for help, right? Because they’re either sick or they’re injured, and documented or undocumented, they have a right to

emergency care. TB, measles, fractures—none of it's getting treated 'cause everybody's too scared to come in. But then they end up here anyway, but then it's too f---ing late! So please, for the love of God, can you just go wait over there in the room with your detainee, so I don't lose any more patients or staff?

ICE agent Russo says, “No problem, Doc,” and then marches over to Pranita declaring she's been cleared to leave. When nurse Jesse Van Horn (Ned Brower) and Dr. McKay protest that she still needs her sling, Russo ignores them, grabbing her by her injured arm to drag her out. Jesse steps in to defend Pranita. The episode cuts to Dana and Robby who hear an altercation taking place in the distance. When they reach the scene, Jesse is being handcuffed on the floor, while staff shout at the agents and one films with her phone.

Robby tries to reassure Jesse that they will get the hospital attorney and instructs him not to say anything. He then pleads with the agents to tell him where they're taking him and when they refuse to say, asks staff about the nearest detention center.

Nurse Perlah Alawi (Amielynn Abellera) asks Robby, “What can we do?”

Robby orders the staff to reassure their patients and get back to work.

Unsurprisingly, the powerful episode has generated a great deal of discussion on X, Reddit and other platforms. The upcoming ICE plot had been announced by media outlets and many viewers were undoubtedly waiting excitedly, some apprehensively, to see how the showrunners would portray the ICE-Gestapo.

Over the past weeks, there have been student walkouts against ICE met with violent repression, mass protests in several cities, including the Detroit area, a further expansion of raids across the country and a pattern of systematic abuse, not exempting children and babies as young as two months old. On March 3, nearly 4,000 healthcare professionals from 49 states issued a joint open letter to then DHS Secretary Kristi Noem demanding the immediate release of all children from ICE detention centers.

In general, critics welcomed the *Pitt* episode. One at AV Club wrote, “‘5:00 P.M.’ rightly depicts ICE as thugs who are tearing apart families and communities, terrorizing American cities, and making hospitals less safe with their presence. In a season full of social issues, it's a welcome, full-throated condemnation of one of the existential threats of our time. No one is safer when ICE is around.”

Various commentators on social media argued that the horror and the ripple effect of ICE agents appearing in a

healthcare facility were well depicted. A vocal subset, however, felt that the show sanitized ICE by having too few agents, too much restraint and even presenting the agency's willingness to bring an injured detainee to the hospital.

One of the critics complained, “This was literally a nice portrayal of ICE. They never would take someone to the ER, they would let them be in pain/bleed out. Also they would have arrested everyone in the room, not just Jesse.”

The creator and executive producer R. Scott Gemmill has commented that the episode was most likely written around mid-2025, before things had “escalated” beyond what the writers could have imagined. “In retrospect, I think we could have pushed a little harder.”

John Wells (executive producer/director) explained that when he told HBO about the planned ICE episode, they gave a note to “make sure it's balanced and we're not just treating the situation as if it doesn't have other points of view.” Other “points of view” on a cruel, anti-democratic crusade by a fascistic White House and its various thuggish accomplices would not do justice to art or the truth.

Gemmill has said in interviews that the episode was written with the possibility in mind that the ICE situation might “go away” and the episode might not resonate by the time it aired. That this seemed a plausible scenario reflects a certain amount of wishful thinking and the view that the current political situation is an aberration that will correct itself.

In any event, the writers and creators deserve credit for what they produced, imagery and drama that will remain in the minds of the millions who watched the episode. It contributes to the intensifying atmosphere of opposition and resistance.



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