“We’re not animals”: Hundreds turn out for viewing for Lorenzo Salgado, as ICE rampage continues nationwide

Tom Hall
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Several hundred people from across Houston, Texas attended a public viewing Thursday evening for Lorenzo Salgado Araujo, the 52-year-old construction contractor killed by an Immigration and Customs Enforcement officer July 7.

The line of mourners wrapped around the Great Chapel at Forest Park Lawndale. Cars continued to pull into the parking lot throughout the evening, and people brought flowers and condolence cards and spoke together in Spanish and English as they waited.

“I’m here to support the family,” said one man who knew Salgado’s sons. “He was on the way to work. It could have been my uncle, it could have been my aunt—it could have been anybody.

“He was here for 30 years, worked his whole life and supported three sons, three really smart guys. One is a schoolteacher here at one of the high schools. One is an engineer, and the other is going to school for engineering. He didn’t deserve it. Killed for the crime of just being born Mexican. That’s it. Killed for the crime of being Mexican.”

As mourners were arriving, newly-installed US Attorney Aaron Reitz released the federal government’s first detailed “account” of the shooting. He said officers had been looking for two Guatemalan men associated with a white van when they encountered Salgado’s work vehicle.

According to Reitz, agents tried to stop the van twice. During the second encounter, their vehicles “successfully surrounded” it. He said Salgado shifted into reverse and then forward while an officer was “partially inside the van or immediately next to it,” after which the officer fired a single shot.

Significantly, his formulation omitted the earlier Department of Homeland Security claim that Salgado had tried to ram an agent, indicating the government’s story is shifting as earlier claims fall apart.

The account flatly contradicts eyewitness testimony that ICE vehicles struck and boxed in the van, after which an agent fired almost immediately in to the passenger side.

The three other men in the van remain locked inside the Montgomery Processing Center in Conroe. They face no criminal charges. The evident purpose of their detention is to prevent them from exposing the government’s account.

An attempt by the Federal Bureau of Investigation to smear Salgado by claiming they discovered a bags of a “white crystalline substance,” implying narcotics, in his van has quickly been exposed. Ruby Powers, an attorney for Salgado’s family, said the bags contained salt prepared each morning by Salgado’s wife. The workers mixed it with lemon and water to replace electrolytes while working construction in the Texas heat.

Harris County District Attorney Sean Teare warned that the unverified drug claim could be used against the three detained witnesses in their deportation proceedings.

A local small business owner told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “We are very good people. We’re here to work. We’re here to contribute to the economy. We’re here to contribute to society.

“We just have to work to make life better for our kids and our families … We’re not criminals. We’re here to work.”

A 57-year-old neighbor who came to the United States from Mexico when he was eight said, “We’re not animals. Not even animals do things like that. People are getting tired already. This is not the right way to treat people because we’re Hispanic. Somebody needs to stop this. It’s just like getting out of the car and going straight to killing people.”

The anger extended to his workplace an hour away, he said. “Everybody is asking, ‘Why is it like that?’ Now we have to watch out for these people. Are they going to come to us and beat us, or probably kill us?

“There are a lot of people I know who say, ‘That’s it, man. I’m getting my things and going back, because what I see going on around here—I don’t feel good. I don’t feel like I’m in the right place now. I might as well go back.’ That’s what people are doing. A lot of people are just going back.”

Local and national Democrats have postured as opponents of the national ICE rampage, but their role as enablers and supporters of it was exposed in a Houston Police Department report released Friday. Houston’s city government is controlled by Democrats.

Between April 1 and June 30, HPD encountered 103 people

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with civil warrants. Police turned 19 of them over to ICE. Fourteen percent were charged with new crimes, while 57 percent were released. Officers detained people for an average of 39 minutes, with some detentions lasting nearly two hours. According to councilwoman Alejandra Salinas the monthly rate of HPD calls to ICE had doubled.

The report appeared three months after Whitmire and the City Council abandoned nearly all of an ordinance limiting HPD collaboration with ICE when Republican Governor Greg Abbott threatened to withhold $114 million in state funding. The quarterly reporting requirement was the lone provision left standing.

Mayor John Whitmire, a Democrat who has close working relations with the extreme-right Texas Republican Party, attended Salgado's viewing. So did Letitia Plummer, the Democratic nominee for Harris County judge.

One woman at the viewing told the WSWS the Republicans and Democrats "all work together."

"I'm not even going to blame a party," she said. "I think there's one side that is actively causing the disease, and then there's another side that keeps selling us the medicine every single cycle.

"Even now, Lorenzo's funeral is an opportunity for a lot of politicians, a lot of candidates to come and really pimp us out, because that's what a lot of organizations do. Even organizations that say they're committed to helping the community—a lot of nonprofits, really, are poverty-pimping institutions."

The man who knew Salgado's sons placed direct responsibility on Trump, but added, "The foundations of ICE policy started in the Biden and Obama administrations. They built off whatever structures were already there and made it 20, 50 times worse—more violent, of course."

Nationwide protests are being called on Saturday, and another demonstration is scheduled for Sunday in Houston.

An 84-page report released Wednesday by Human Rights Watch and the American Civil Liberties Union shed more light on the brutality of the American immigration Gestapo. It found that about 90 percent of detainees interviewed at Camp East Montana at Fort Bliss in El Paso, built on a US Army base, had been beaten by guards or witnessed guards beating others.

Detainees described groups of 10 to 20 masked guards dressed in black and wearing no name tags storming the tent units. They said guards beat people for requesting medicine, protesting spoiled or insufficient food and asking to go outside after weeks without sunlight. One detainee said guards tackled him during a peaceful hunger strike, choked him, ripped off his pants and slammed his head against the ground. Another said guards stomped on his neck after he asked for food following a wait of more than 20 hours.

Bathrooms were covered in feces and urine, according to the report. Housing units flooded with dirty water. Detainees said they went without soap and clean clothing and were prevented from calling lawyers and family members. At least 50 told researchers that officials used threats and violence to pressure them to abandon their immigration cases. Guards threatened to prosecute or imprison those who refused deportation to countries where they had never lived.

One man recalled the words used by guards when he arrived: "You're only getting out deported or dead." Three detainees have died at the camp since it opened last August. A medical examiner ruled one death a homicide, while a federal investigation found that evidence had been "missing or destroyed."

The AP has counted at least 10 people who have died in encounters with immigration agents since Trump returned to office last year. at least seven people shot to death during immigration operations over that same , and Detention Watch Network has reported 53 deaths in ICE custody.

The woman at Salgado's viewing described the atmosphere developing in the United States. Asked whether fascism was being normalized, she replied, "Oh, totally. We see it not just in social issues—I mean fiscal issues. [They're] always blaming poor people, always blaming those who make the [worst] wages for all the problems. Along with that, minorities are to blame."

Those really responsible, she said, were "a combination of corporate greed and people in power who are looking to exploit whoever they're able to exploit for their own benefit. They control every part of society, starting with the media, so it's real. Reuters has separately documented how easy it is to scapegoat immigrants, minorities, the elderly, single mothers, people who make low wages—people who are struggling. It has become so common to just punch down.

"For the past year, we've given these corporations everything that they've asked for—every bailout, every benefit. Now they're sucking up our water resources with all these data centers. They still have the nerve to push all this inflation, and these politicians aren't doing [anything]. They're letting this happen. Wages are stagnant."

Asked about workers organizing across nationality and immigration status to oppose ICE and demand justice for Salgado, the man who knew Salgado's sons said, "Obviously, the working class should come together at times like this. It's an up-versus-down [fight]."

The woman replied, "I think [a movement of the working class] is not only going to be beneficial, but is essential to the struggle."

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