Notes on US political repression and state violence

By a reporter
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Third immigrant from Delaney detention center dies

An immigrant from Guatemala who was being held at the notorious Delaney Hall detention center in Newark, New Jersey died from a seizure after he was transferred to a hospital, officials said Wednesday. Jose Chajon-Raxon is the third detainee from Delaney to die since the Trump administration reopened the prison in May 2025.

Chajon-Raxon was arrested by ICE agents and taken to Delaney on July 18, according to a statement from the Department of Homeland Security. The next morning he appeared to be having a seizure, and he was taken to University Hospital in Newark. DHS claimed that the Guatemalan was "released from ICE custody on July 22," but it is not clear what day he actually died. The second immigrant held at Delaney to die, Edwin Lopez-Cornejo, 41, was also transferred to University Hospital and pronounced dead there August 1, without a cause of death being made public.

ICE frequently releases prisoners who are on death's door, allowing them to claim they have no responsibility for the fatality. In June, ICE officials stopped reporting the deaths of those detainees who had been released from federal custody. "ICE is not responsible when an individual passes away weeks after leaving their custody," the DHS said.

The New Jersey state government has sued GEO Group, the private prison company that operates Delaney Hall, because state health officials were denied access to the medical unit and other areas when they sought to inspect them. On August 7, the state opened a civil rights investigation into Delaney.

Former Southern Poverty Law Center employee arrested

A former chief financial officer of the Southern Poverty Law Center, who oversaw a project to infiltrate and expose white supremacist groups, was indicted and arrested in California on charges of fraud concocted by the Trump Department of Justice as part of its efforts to protect his fascist supporters.

Heidi Beirich, who left the employment of the civil rights group six years ago, was in charge of a project tracking right-wing hate groups, which included paying informants. Given the great dangers faced both by the informants and Beirich herself, the payments were routed through bank accounts for non-existent companies. There is no suggestion that Beirich was actually guilty of fraud, only that the subterfuge was used to protect her and her informants from fascist retaliation.

At a news conference Wednesday in Washington, Attorney General Todd Blanche presented Beirich's actions as though they were money laundering by a drug lord. "I believe she was part of the effort to open bank accounts in completely fictitious companies' names and make payments to individuals for reasons that were not accurate as described," he said. "This is exactly what we said would happen in a case like this, which is that our investigators and the US attorneys and the agents working the case can keep on working it even after the initial indictment."

The indictment against Beirich, on charges of wire fraud, submitting false statements to a bank, and money laundering, was returned Tuesday by a federal grand jury in Montgomery, Alabama. The SPLC, which is based in Montgomery, was charged in April for similar

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offences, although information it collected on hate groups has been shared with state and federal police for many years—until Trump.

"Dr. Beirich is innocent, and this case is without merit," her attorney, Michael J. Proctor said in a statement. "We believe the charges against her and the SPLC are politically motivated, and Dr. Beirich has been targeted in this case because of the important work she has done to combat hate groups and extremists."

Three states execute prisoners on the same day

Three states, all governed by right-wing Republican allies of Donald Trump, carried out executions on Thursday, the first such simultaneous actions in nearly 16 years. Five states have executed a total of 22 prisoners this year.

Tennessee executed Anthony Darrell Hines, 66, despite his appeals to the courts and Governor Bill Lee, citing his health conditions, including two strokes that left him partially paralyzed. The Tennessee Supreme Court ruled against a stay of execution last week, and Lee has refused any delay. Hines has been on death row for 40 years, after stabbing a woman to death.

Alabama executed Jeremy Williams, 42, by lethal injection, for the rape and murder of five-year-old Kamarie Holland in 2021. Williams was convicted in 2024 and had dropped appeals, effectively speeding up his own death sentence.

Oklahoma executed Carlos Cuesta-Rodriguez, 70, for the murder of his girlfriend in 2003, after she decided to leave him. While his attorneys cited brain damage, post-traumatic stress disorder and psychotic episodes as reasons for clemency, Cuesta-Rodriguez told the state Pardon and Parole Board he did not want clemency, and the board voted by 3-1 to allow the execution to proceed.

US Attorney for Washington DC convenes special grand jury

US Attorney Jeanine Pirro has convened a special grand jury in the US capital, to be headed by Steven Vandervelden, a Pirro assistant who has carried out a series of politically motivated investigations for the Trump administration. These include the investigation into the finances of then-Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell, and a probe of the crime statistics compiled by the Washington DC police department. Trump denounced the police statistics as covering up what he claimed was a crime wave before he sent the National Guard in to occupy the city.

The Justice Department did not make public what the focus of the new special grand jury would be, but Pirro took the action after being publicly flayed by Trump for her dropping of vandalism charges over damage to the Reflecting Pool. She cited evidence that the damage was caused by the incompetent contractor, who had worked on the pools at Trump's resorts but never on a project as large as the pool which extends from the Lincoln Memorial to the Washington Monument. The White House asked the Department of Justice to consider a new prosecution of David Hearn, whose indictment was dropped last week.

The rules for the special grand jury limit it to a single case or a closely related sequence, but unlike a regular grand jury it can issue a report vilifying the subject of its investigation even if it does not find enough evidence to bring an indictment. This is clearly a feature sought by Pirro in order to satisfy Trump's desire to target his political enemies.

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