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Left And Right Agree: Investigators Should Release Yantis Killing Video

Dustin Hurst

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America's political left and right agree: Idaho State Police investigators must release video accounts of two Adams County Sheriff's Deputies shooting and killing Council rancher Jack Yantis — if footage exists.

Today, American Civil Liberties Union and the Cato Institute experts told IdahoReporter.com that police have a moral and legal duty to make the videos public if the devices worn by the deputies captured the killing.

Chad Marlow, Advocacy and Policy Council for the ACLU, said if police block the release of any video it undermines the public's trust in law enforcement.

"The entire purpose behind [body cameras] .. is because they are helpful in increasing police transparency and accountability," Marlow said.

Adams County Sheriff Ryan Zollman told a local newspaper his deputies wore body cameras during the Nov. 1 confrontation with Yantis, but didn't say whether the devices captured the incident.

Marlow, a top advocate for wise use of the devices attached to police, said some skeptical law enforcement officials aren't proponents of body cameras, so they block rightful public access to important footage.

"Police body cameras are going to be a part the of 21st century," Marlow said. "[Opponents] have chosen to draw the line at not letting the public see the footage — which undermines body cameras completely."

After a string of killings by officers across the nation, a myriad of police agencies are seeking to equip their officers with body cameras. President Barack Obama's U.S. Justice Department

recently provided more than \$20 million to cover a portion of device costs, though some critics worry the money comes with too many strings.

Matthew Feeney, a Cato Institute policy analyst, suggested police release the footage to any interested parties after a public records request, but also offered room for a compromise.

In an email Feeney stated, “At the very least I think that the rancher’s next of kin should be able to view the body camera footage.”

Marlow agreed, “It’s a basic human right to know what led to the demise of a family member.”

Jay Stanley, the ACLU’s senior policy analyst on speech and privacy matters, said police can delay release, but didn’t prescribe how long officials could wait.

“We call for public release of video where there has been a critical incident such as a shooting,” Stanley said. “In some cases there may be sufficient reason to temporarily delay such release, but generally the public’s interest in oversight how police officials utilize deadly force ... overcomes the countervailing interests in such cases.”

ISP spokeswoman Teresa Baker said this week the agency isn’t sure when it might release the videos — if clips exist. She intimated a premature release might hamper or harm the active investigation of the incident.

“I am sure that you and your readers understand that if ISP or the Adams County Sheriff’s Office release evidence, or even the existence of evidence, it could compromise the investigation into this incident,” Baker told IdahoReporter.com this week.

Marlow rejected Baker’s point. “How would it harm the investigation?” he asked. “This act took place on a public road and there was use of force.”

He said police should withhold some information if it might tip off a criminal, but added this is not that.

“All the people who possibly could have acted were on the scene,” he said, “and I suspect they’ve already seen the video.”

Barlow took it a step further and criticized police officers willing to hide important video footage. “It’s a very convenient thing to say if you don’t want the public to see what your officers were doing,” he said of Baker’s assertion that release might hinder an investigation.

Friends have set up a GoFundMe account to help Yantis’ surviving wife, Donna, cover medical expenses. She suffered a heart attack shortly after deputies shot and killed her husband. The webpage describes Jack Yantis as a “lifelong Council icon.”