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Newsweek

Stop Politicizing the Unexplained Death of a Border Agent

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Last November, Border Patrol agent Rogelio Martinez died in the line of duty.

At the time, it was unclear how Agent Martinez perished and many jumped to the conclusion that he was murdered.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott (R-TX) said Martinez was killed in “an attack.” Texas Senator Ted Cruz (R-TX) went further, arguing that Rogelio’s death shows just how insecure the border is and that the Border Patrol needs more resources.

A spokesperson for the National Border Patrol Council, the union for Border Patrol agents, said that Martinez may have been bludgeoned to death by rocks. They all jumped the gun.

Martinez’s death remains a mystery, but an FBI investigation found no evidence of an attack.

The government records all Border Patrol agent and Customs officer deaths in the line of duty. A total of 33 Border Patrol agents died from 2003 through 2017 (Table 1). The ratio of agents to deaths was the lowest in 2004, but more agents died in 2012.

The annual chance of a Border Patrol agent dying in the line of duty was about one in 7,968 per year during the whole period. Only six of the 33 Border Patrol agents who died in the line of duty were murdered. The only confirmed murder in 2017 was of Border Patrol Agent Isaac Morales. Twenty-six died because of accidents and Rogelio’s death is still a mystery (see Table 2).

Although Border Patrol agents do sometimes die tragically, they are less likely to be murdered on the job than the average American. Since 2003, about 1 in 43,824 Border Patrol were murdered each year while on the job. That compares favorably to about 1 in 19,431 Americans murdered per year over the same time. Regular Americans were more than twice as likely to be murdered in any year from 2003 through 2017 than Border Patrol agents were.

Hopefully, investigators will soon discover how Agent Rogelio Martinez actually died.

In the meantime, the political circus surrounding his tragic death should be a lesson to all public officials and unions involved: Don't use the death of a Border Patrol agent to argue for policy changes until you have all of the facts.

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