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## 4 Nevada killings put neighbors on edge, no motive disclosed

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A suspect in four Nevada killings who was said to be in the U.S. illegally used his passport for identification at a Carson City pawn shop where he is accused of selling jewelry allegedly stolen from some of the dead, a store owner said Thursday.

Wilber Ernesto Martinez-Guzman, 19, from El Salvador, did not speak English well, “but there wasn’t anything that just made us say, ‘This is odd or weird,’” Allen Rowe, owner of several Northern Nevada Coin stores, told The Associated Press.

A criminal complaint filed late Wednesday, before Martinez-Guzman’s first court appearance Thursday in Carson City, suggested property theft as a motive for the slayings. Just hours before court, prosecutors added two dozen weapons crimes and brought to 31 the number of felonies alleged in a 36-count criminal complaint.

Martinez-Guzman is not charged with any slayings in Carson City, but prosecutors in nearby Douglas and Washoe counties, where the victims lived, say they plan to file murder charges in the coming days.

During Thursday’s hearing, he was expected to receive a court-appointed lawyer to represent him on the current charges. He also faces a federal immigration hold.

The murder investigation began Jan. 10, when 56-year-old Connie Koontz was found dead in her home. Three days later, the body of 74-year-old Sophia Renken was discovered in her home not far from where Koontz lived, authorities said.

Less than a week after that, on Jan. 16, the bodies of 81-year-old Gerald David and his 80-year-old wife, Sharon, were found in their home on the southern edge of Reno.

The Carson City case against Martinez-Guzman focuses on possession and sale of stolen property and alleges that, because he was in the U.S. illegally, he was prohibited from having 12 guns stolen from the Davids, who were prominent members and officers of the Reno Rodeo Association.

One felony charge alleges that Martinez-Guzman had several belt buckles bearing the names Jerry David and Sherri David that were valued at up to \$3,500.

Court documents allege that between Jan. 12 and Jan. 17, Martinez-Guzman made \$412 selling Koontz’s rings and \$126 selling an engraved ring that belonged to Gerald David.

Rowe said routine receipt paperwork that goes to local sheriffs, along with store video, led authorities to Martinez-Guzman last week.

“We had him on camera, we had his ID. They could pinpoint who he was,” the pawn shop owner said. “Because we do everything aboveboard, it led to this person being caught. Had he sold it online or met someone somewhere else it could have gone unreported.”

Carson City Sheriff Ken Furlong has said federal immigration authorities told investigators that Martinez-Guzman was from El Salvador and is in the U.S. illegally. Immigration and Customs Enforcement officials have not provided details about how he entered the U.S.

The killings became part of the national immigration debate when President Donald Trump cited them as evidence of the need for the proposed U.S.-Mexico border wall at the heart of a partial government shutdown.

Since the first days of his presidency, Trump has repeatedly pointed to crimes committed by immigrants in the country illegally to argue that the U.S. needs a border wall and tougher immigration policies.

Many academics and Trump’s critics have pushed back on this narrative, citing studies that have found immigrants are less likely to commit crimes than people born in the United States.

University of California, Irvine, sociology professor Ruben Rumbaut co-authored a recent study that said crime rates fell sharply from 1990 to 2015 at a time when illegal immigration spiked. Crime rates were low in immigrant-rich and border cities such as El Paso, Texas, and San Diego.

Alex Nowrasteh of the libertarian Cato Institute, reviewed academic literature in 2015 and found that “with few exceptions, immigrants are less crime prone than natives or have no effect on crime rates.”