

ICE accountability commission issues first report

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A state commission dedicated to documenting misconduct by federal immigration agents and making policy recommendations issued its initial report Friday, while also adopting a new direction to look at high-ranking White House officials.

The Illinois Accountability Commission, created through executive order by Gov. J.B. Pritzker in October, has spent recent months reviewing actions of federal agents stationed in the Chicagoland area during President Donald Trump's "Operation Midway Blitz" immigration enforcement campaign, including public testimony provided at its first open hearing in mid-December.

Ahead of the commission's second public hearing Friday, Pritzker asked the commission to expand its review to include major Trump officials, including the now-ousted Customs and Border Patrol "com-

mander at large" Gregory Bovino, White House "border czar" Tom Homan, Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem, and Stephen Miller, Trump's deputy chief of staff for policy.

"For too long, Gregory Bovino and his rogue federal agents have terrorized communities in Illinois and across the country, violated our people's constitutional rights, and unleashed violence at every turn," Pritzker said. "Bovino packing his bags cannot detract from our mission (of) accountability."

In addition to eight named officials, Pritzker's request applied to additional "deputies, subordinates and officials across the Trump hierarchy who may have played a role in the federal deployments."

The commission agreed to take up that mandate, with Commission Chair and former U.S. District Court Judge Rubén Castillo signaling that the commission may recommend disciplinary action or prosecution related

to the shootings of Silverio Villegas González, a father of two killed by ICE agents in Franklin Park in September and of teaching assistant Marimar Martinez, shot five times by a Border Patrol agent in October.

"Just imagine if agents who shot Mr. Villegas González back on Sept. 12 had been publicly disciplined. Imagine a world where that had happened, maybe, just maybe, the Minnesota shootings would not have occurred and two people would be alive who are now dead," Castillo said, referencing the fatal shootings of Renee Good and Alex Pretti in Minneapolis.

The commission's report also states that it "is seeking to make referrals for criminal or civil prosecution for misconduct by federal immigration agents."

Erosion of legitimacy

The three-hour hearing in downtown Chicago featured testimony from professors, legal scholars, his-

torians, journalists and law enforcement professionals.

University of Chicago Professor of Political Science Robert Pape focused on the public's perception of Operation Midway Blitz and the ongoing immigration enforcement campaign in Minnesota.

The Trump administration's denial of visible facts, like the claim that Alex Pretti was holding a gun in his hand and approached agents with the intent to "massacre them," undermines the government's legitimacy, Pape said.

"Democracies don't fail when laws are enforced," Pape said. "They fail when enforcement loses legitimacy and people stop believing restraint will protect them. That is why Minneapolis is a crisis for the nation."

But that crisis, he said, did not start in Minnesota. Pape pointed to DHS's characterization of Martinez, the Chicago woman shot in October, as a "do-

mestic terrorist." The administration ultimately dropped its charges against Martinez after it was revealed that the agent who shot her had bragged over text about the shooting.

Martinez' lawyer has recently sought to have video footage from her case released, as he said it contradicts the administration's claim that she had prevented the agents from passing by. The evidence from her case remains under a protective order that prevents its release, which her legal team says has allowed DHS to control the narrative without evidence.

If people do not trust the government to tell them the truth and to use its force to protect them, they will resist, Pape argued. Immigration enforcement officers' reliance on face masks and coverings also deteriorates that legitimacy, he said.

"The mask, of course, is building a perception that the state doesn't want to be

truthful about its use of force," Pape said.

That contributed to a perception by over half of Chicago residents that Operation Midway Blitz was about exerting political control, rather than a legitimate immigration enforcement campaign, according to a study conducted by the University of Chicago.

Garrett Graff, an author, journalist and historian who has documented the evolution of ICE and CBP for over two decades, outlined a long history of abuses and misconduct inside the organizations.

Nearly 5,000 Border Patrol agents have been arrested since 2005, said Graff.

For years, the ICE budget was expected to support around 400,000 deportations annually, or 3,000 a day. But in April, the administration set a new goal: deport one million people per year. That quota has required the administration to hire people quickly.