

SIX PROSECUTORS QUIT AS A WIDOW FACES AN INQUIRY

FALLOUT OF ICE KILLING

One of Those Leaving in Minnesota Oversaw a Major Fraud Case

By ERNESTO LONDOÑO

Six federal prosecutors in Minnesota resigned on Tuesday over the Justice Department's push to investigate the widow of a woman killed by an ICE agent and the department's reluctance to investigate the shooter, according to people with knowledge of their decision.

Joseph H. Thompson, who was second in command at the U.S. attorney's office and oversaw a sprawling fraud investigation that has roiled Minnesota's political landscape, was among those who quit on Tuesday, according to three people with knowledge of the decision.

Mr. Thompson's resignation came after senior Justice Department officials pressed for a criminal investigation into the actions of the widow of Renee Nicole Good, the Minneapolis woman killed by an ICE agent on Jan. 7.

Mr. Thompson, 47, a career prosecutor, objected to that approach, as well as to the Justice Department's refusal to include state officials in investigating whether the shooting itself was lawful, the people familiar with his decision said.

The Minneapolis police chief, Brian O'Hara, said in an interview that Mr. Thompson's resignation dealt a major blow to efforts to root out rampant theft from state agencies. The fraud cases, which involve schemes to cheat safety net programs, were the chief reason the Trump administration cited for its immigration crackdown in the state. The vast majority of defendants charged in the cases are American citizens of Somali origin.

"When you lose the leader responsible for making the fraud cases, it tells you this isn't really about prosecuting fraud," Mr. O'Hara said.

The other senior career prosecutors who resigned include Harry Jacobs, Melinda Williams and Thomas Calhoun-Lopez. Mr. Jacobs had been Mr. Thompson's deputy overseeing the fraud inquiry, which began in 2022. Mr. Calhoun-Lopez was the chief of the violent and major crimes unit.

Mr. Thompson, Mr. Jacobs, Ms. Williams and Mr. Calhoun-Lopez declined to discuss the reasons they resigned. The Justice Department did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Tuesday's resignations followed tumultuous days at the U.S. attorney's office in Minnesota as prosecutors there and in Wash-

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CLASHES IN MINNESOTA Tensions between residents and federal agents have risen in recent days. From top: Agents arrested a woman after smashing her car window; a woman threw a snowball at agents who had tossed tear gas canisters; and a protester was arrested after a scuffle. Page A15.

U.S. Deployed Cloaked Plane In Boat Attack

Strategy in Fatal Strike May Be a War Crime

This article is by Charlie Savage, Eric Schmitt, John Ismay, Julian E. Barnes, Riley Mellen and Christian Triebert.

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon used a secret aircraft painted to look like a civilian plane in its first attack on a boat that the Trump administration said was smuggling drugs, killing 11 people last September, according to officials briefed on the matter. The aircraft also carried its munitions inside the fuselage, rather than visibly under its wings, they said.

The nonmilitary appearance is significant, according to legal specialists, because the administration has argued its lethal boat attacks are lawful — not murders — because President Trump “determined” the United States is in an armed conflict with drug cartels.

But the laws of armed conflict prohibit combatants from feigning civilian status to fool adversaries into dropping their guard, then attacking and killing them. That is a war crime called “perfidy.”

Retired Maj. Gen. Steven J. Lepper, a former deputy judge advocate general for the United States Air Force, said that if the aircraft had been painted in a way that disguised its military nature and got close enough for the people on the boat to see it — tricking them into failing to realize they should take evasive action or surrender to survive — that was a war crime under armed-conflict standards.

“Shielding your identity is an element of perfidy,” he said. “If the aircraft flying above is not identifiable as a combatant aircraft, it should not be engaged in combatant activity.”

The aircraft swooped in low enough for the people aboard the boat to see it, according to officials who have seen or been briefed on surveillance video from the attack. The boat had turned back toward Venezuela, apparently after seeing the plane, before the first strike.

Two survivors of the initial attack later appeared to wave at the aircraft after clambering aboard an overturned piece of the hull, before the military killed them in a follow-up strike that also sank the

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More on the White House

HOUSING Officials say they are exploring policies that might help people buy or sell homes and lower their payments. PAGE A14

FAMILIES Conservatives want more action to encourage Americans to have children. PAGE A16

CIVIL RIGHTS The president says white people were the real victims of discrimination. PAGE A14

JUSTICES APPEAR TO BACK BARRING TRANS ATHLETES

LAWS ON FEMALE TEAMS

Court Split Ideologically on Cases That Could Affect 27 States

By ANN E. MARIMOW

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court's conservative majority on Tuesday seemed inclined to uphold a pair of state laws barring the participation of transgender athletes from girls' and women's sports teams.

The outcome of the cases from West Virginia and Idaho has implications for the 25 other states with similar laws and for athletes who compete in school and collegiate sports around the country.

Becky Pepper-Jackson, a high school sophomore from West Virginia, and Lindsay Hecox, a college senior in Idaho, challenged the laws, which require that participation on girls' sports teams be based on “biological sex,” defined as a person's sex assigned at birth.

During more than three hours of lively discussion, the justices grappled with concerns about fairness, scientific uncertainty



Demonstrators outside the Supreme Court on Tuesday.

and discrimination and seemed divided along ideological lines.

The three liberal justices, appearing to recognize the likely outcome, suggested through their questions that even if the laws are constitutional in most cases, perhaps the two transgender athletes at the heart of Tuesday's arguments should be able to pursue their individual challenges.

Allowing their cases to be reviewed again by a lower court, the justices suggested, would give the athletes a chance to try to show that they themselves do not possess unfair competitive advantages even if some transgender girls do.

The conservative justices emphasized that federal law has long allowed separate sports teams for boys and girls to ensure fair competition, and they raised concerns about undermining the goals of Title IX, the civil rights statute that

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Evidence of Deadly Brutality Peeks Through Iran's Blackout

This article is by Erika Solomon, Farnaz Fassihi, Sanam Mahoozi and Sanjana Varghese.

As the Iranian authorities impose a near-total communication blackout on a country convulsed by mass protests, videos and witness accounts slowly emerging suggest that the government is waging one of its deadliest crackdowns on unrest in more than a decade.

Eyewitnesses say government forces have begun opening fire, apparently with automatic weapons and at times seemingly indiscriminately, on unarmed protesters. Hospital workers say protesters had been coming in with

pellet injuries but now arrive with gunshot wounds and skull fractures. One doctor called it a “mass-casualty situation.”

Despite the communications blockade, a recurring image has made its way out of Iran: rows and rows of body bags.

In videos uploaded by opposition activists on social media, families can be seen sobbing as they huddle together over bloodied corpses in unzipped bags. And in footage aired on Iranian state television, a morgue official, sheathed in blue scrubs, stands amid bags neatly arranged along the floor of a white room, under glaring fluorescent lights.

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As Fears Grow, Citizens Join Military to Protect Migrant Parents

By GREG JAFFE

THE DALLES, Ore. — She believed that the key to being a good recruiter was not just pitching the military and its benefits, but herself. Sgt. First Class Rosa Cortez wanted potential recruits to notice the pictures of her smiling children, her college diploma and the awards she had earned in the course of her nearly 20 years with the Oregon National Guard.

Her goal was to “radiate positivity,” she said. “People will see it and want to align with you.”

Lately though, she, along with hundreds of other recruiters around the country, had been offering something else: protection from the government she served. President Trump's second term

In Oregon, a Recruiter for the Guard Draws on Her Own Story

has been defined by an extensive crackdown on undocumented immigrants that has set off waves of fear in places with large Hispanic populations. In many of these areas, a little-known government program called Parole in Place has become a refuge of last resort and a powerful recruiting tool.

Only U.S. citizens and permanent residents are eligible to enlist in the military.

The Parole in Place program, started in 2013, provides the undocumented parents and spouses

of service members protection from deportation, and an expedited pathway to permanent residency.

In early December, Sergeant Cortez was working with six potential recruits who wanted to use the program. One of them was Juan, a 23-year-old with messy black hair and a gold earring. (Juan requested that his last name be withheld to protect his undocumented family members.)

Juan had seen a video that Sergeant Cortez posted on social media and contacted her about enlisting. “I would like it if you could provide me some more information before I come to a decision,” he wrote in a text message in late September.

Sergeant Cortez sent a message

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Lindsey Vazquez's mother and father are on track to receive permanent residency cards.

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Scamming the World

In Myanmar, a rare look inside one of the compounds where the online fraud industry makes its billions. PAGE A6

Rediscovering Syria's Gems

Fueled by a sense of hope, a hiking group has begun exploring areas once off limits during the civil war. PAGE A12



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What Seniors Are Leaving Out

Students are worried that sharing information — about their race, gender and immigration status — could hurt their college chances. PAGE A13

Hochul Echoes Mamdani

In her State of the State, Gov. Kathy Hochul adopted the New York City mayor's affordability message. PAGE A21

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China Picks at U.S. Poverty

The state media is using the gaming phrase “kill line” to assert political superiority over America. PAGE B1

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A Recurring Acting Governor

Richard J. Codey, a New Jersey legislator for 50 years, filled in as the top executive over 100 times. He was 79. PAGE B10

The Creator of 'Dilbert'

Scott Adams, 68, wrote a popular comic strip that satirized office life. Racist comments undid his career. PAGE B10



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Her Final Quest for Gold

Brittany Bowe, who has become mentor and medal contender for U.S. speedskaters, is heading to her fourth and last Olympics. PAGE B6

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The idea of having an in-season tournament akin to the N.B.A. Cup presents possibilities and challenges. PAGE B8

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Inside a Marital Breakup

Belle Burden shook off her natural reserve to turn her viral essay on divorce into a bracing memoir. PAGE C1

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Thomas L. Friedman

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