

Remarks by ICE Director John Morton

Funeral of ICE Special Agent Jaime J. Zapata

AS DELIVERED

Good morning. My name is John Morton. I'm a colleague of Jaime Zapata's and Director of Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

The American poet William Wallace once wrote "Every man dies. Not every man really lives." We are here today, in this place, to honor a man who really lived - Jaime Jorge Zapata. A man who followed his father Amador into a career of law enforcement - a career not of riches but of service and sacrifice; a career of protecting people and their communities from criminals; a career of putting himself in harm's way for the benefit of others.

Jaime died at the hands of gunmen on a highway in the state of San Luis Potosi in Mexico, a long, long way from home. His death was a dark moment - an unspeakable loss for his parents, for his four brothers, for his fiancé Stacye. It was also a dark day for ICE and all of Jaime's fellow agents and officers.

I submit to you, however, that as dark as this moment is, Jaime's life is really all about light. Everyone in this room will eventually meet his or her Maker, and the real question on that day won't be how we died but how we lived. When it's my turn, I want to say that I lived like Jaime.

I want to say that I fought like Jaime for what was right, what was decent, what was good. I want to say that I treated others like Jaime did - standing by my friends and family through thick and thin; more concerned about others than myself. I want to say that I had a purpose like Jaime did - wanting to make a difference in this world; believing in my agency and its mission; doing my job with integrity.

Jaime Zapata died fighting for what was right. Fighting to protect not only the people of this country but also the people of Mexico from drug traffickers and organized criminals.

Mr. and Mrs. Zapata your son represents the best of America - he is why we are a great country. The men who shot into his car are empty and without souls. They could live a thousand years but would still amount to nothing, nothing compared to Jaime.

Like so many of our agents and officers, Jaime joined ICE after a stint with the Border Patrol. He spent his last five years in our office in Laredo. In short order he became one of our best, investigating drug trafficking, gun running and money laundering. He was simply born to be a special agent.

He was known for his dedication, love of his job, and caring nature. He loved fishing and barbequing, had a beautiful voice, and a great sense of humor. His best quality, however, was that he didn't have a selfish bone in his body. His mother raised him right.

He loved his friends and family without reservation; he was always more concerned about helping others than himself, and he never did a truly mean turn to anyone. As Victor Avila, the man shot with Jaime that day put it, "Jaime was just genuinely a good guy."

Folks, we have lost something special in Jaime Zapata. Something rare. Something not easily replaced. ICE is fortunate to count him as one of our own.

Now I say ICE is fortunate, and not was fortunate, because Jaime is and always will be very much alive at ICE. His approach to life is our approach: belief in the mission; in our country; in making a difference; in right always, always triumphing over wrong.

This has been a very hard week for ICE, but we are a great agency doing right by the people of this country. We will prevail in this dark moment. No one - not gunmen in Mexico, not criminals here - will keep us from doing our job.

And it's not just ICE that will rise to honor and vindicate Jaime Zapata and Victor Avila. Like the Zapata family, ICE has brothers - a lot of them. DEA, FBI, ATF, CBP, the Secret Service, the Marshals, CIS, state police, county sheriffs, city police departments. In Mexico, SSP, PGR, the military, Aduanas.

Together, the United States and Mexico will bring the long, hard arm of the law down on Jaime and Victor's shooters. Together we will look after our people. Together we will continue to see that Jaime and Victor's work is done and that the rule of law triumphs over lawlessness and empty violence. There is no other way. Acquiescing to the rule of criminals consigns our children, Mexico's children to a hopeless and empty path. My friends: no retreat, no compromise. Our cause is just, our cause is right, there is no other way.

Let me close by thanking the Zapata family for lending us Jaime. Your son, your brother, your fiancé was an exceptional man, and you should take enormous pride in his work and the way he lived his life. He was a credit to our agency and someone we will honor for a very, very long time.

Thank God America has people like Jaime Zapata. We would be lost if we didn't.

God bless and all of you remember Jaime Zapata for the great agent and the great person that he was.