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Outrage in El Monte over abduction, execution of popular school board member in Mexico

January 1, 2010 | 9:15 am



Residents in El Monte expressed outrage today over the killing of a 33-year-old school board member who was abducted and killed along with five other men during a holiday vacation in Durango, Mexico, this week.

"I hope this focuses people's attention on the senseless killings taking place in Mexico right now," said El Monte Mayor Andre Quintero, 34, who was close friends with slaying victim Agustin Roberto "Bobby" Salcedo. "He is a major figure in this community. He was a teacher for years, so imagine all the students he taught."

Salcedo was having dinner with his wife in a restaurant when armed men burst in and kidnapped him and five other men. All six were found dead Thursday, El Monte officials said. Salcedo's wife was not abducted.




Salcedo, who was also the assistant principal of instruction at El Monte High School, had arrived in the Mexican city of Gomez Palacio earlier this week. The city of 240,000 is in the state of Durango and is the hometown of Salcedo's wife, Betsy.

Salcedo, who was born and raised in the Los Angeles area, and his wife were dining with some of her former classmates when the attack occurred, said Salcedo's brother, Carlos.




"They ordered everyone to the floor. They threatened to shoot them all if anyone dared to look up. They abducted the men," Carlos Salcedo said. "Their whereabouts were unknown until the police chief informed my sister-in-law that they found the bodies, my brother included."

The bodies were discovered alongside a canal, [local media reported](#). All had been shot in the head, and dozens of spent bullet casings were found at the site, suggesting they had been slain on the spot, the reports said.

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Carlos Salcedo said he did not know the identities of the other men.

Friends and family were in shock Thursday. They said there was no reason for the couple to be targeted. Salcedo's wife told family members that she did not recognize any of the gunmen's voices.

"From all accounts right now, it sounds random," Carlos Salcedo said. "There is no reason for my brother to be targeted."

Raging drug violence and rampant corruption have been a major problem in Durango, a tense, rough state. The local Catholic archbishop, Hector Gonzalez Martinez, [recently described the region](#) to The Times as one where gunmen "own the night" in village after village, even threatening priests.

The couple had been married two years, and Betzy Salcedo was a physician in Mexico. She has been preparing for examinations to practice in the United States.

Carlos Salcedo said his brother's wife was devastated.

"She's extremely brokenhearted. It's a nightmare. I can't believe it's happening," he said. "My brother had just such a bright future. He was finishing up his doctorate at UCLA — just the type of person you want in your community as a leader."

In November, Salcedo was reelected to a new term on the school board of the [El Monte City School District](#), which governs the city's elementary schools.

Salcedo was born to a family of Mexican immigrants who arrived in the Los Angeles area in the 1960s. His father was a construction worker and his mother a homemaker. They had only an elementary school education, Carlos Salcedo said, but they pushed their five children to succeed educationally, and all went to college.

Salcedo wanted to give back to his community by becoming an educator, his brother said. Salcedo was student body president when he attended Mountain View High School in El Monte in the early 1990s and graduated from Cal State Long Beach with a degree in history, later earning a master's degree in educational administration at Cal State San Bernardino. He had been completing work on a doctorate in educational leadership at UCLA.

Before becoming a school administrator, he taught world history, government and economics. He inspired some of his former students to become teachers themselves, and some now work in El Monte, his brother said.

Quintero said Salcedo was devoted to education and leadership. The mayor said his friend volunteered at book giveaways and food drives.

"Bobby was an absolute bright, shining star in our community," Quintero said.

Gomez Palacio was a familiar city to Salcedo. He and his wife married there about 2 1/2 years ago, and Salcedo was a past president of the South El Monte/Gomez Palacio sister city organization.

Quintero said he hoped authorities would do whatever they can to catch the suspects.

"They didn't just take his life. They robbed him from our community. ... We have to get justice," he said.

Quintero said Salcedo worked with community colleges to get students from the community into universities. "Think of all the people his life has touched," he said. "This is a huge, huge loss to the community. This guy was a leader from when he was young. He was student body president at Mountain View High school, and he chose to come back and serve El Monte."

According to a [Times interactive map](#), there were at least 669 drug-related killings in Durango between Jan. 1, 2007, and May 29 of last year, the most recent information available from the University of San Diego Trans Border Institute's analysis of data from the Agencia Reforma newspaper group. Overall in Mexico, more than 9,900 drug-related killings occurred during that period.

-- Hector Becerra in El Monte and Rong-Gong Lin II in Los Angeles

Photo: Andy Fernandez, 26, of South El Monte, wipes a tear from his face at El Monte City Hall, where a photo of slain El Monte school board member Agustin Roberto "Bobby" Salcedo and his wife was on display. Credit: Rick Loomis / Los Angeles Times

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My condolences to the family members of the victims. These are unnecessary deaths. I have met many proponents of "Vacation in mexico". Well, why go to mexico when there are so many other places in our hemisphere that are not war torn. Spring Break is approaching-Parents send your kids of to another location. Stay out of mexico-there are no safe zones!!!
The life you save maybe your own...

Posted by: Billy Bob | January 01, 2010 at 09:29 AM

Best to avoid Mexico at this time. Too bad, since many areas are beautiful, and honest businesses need the tourist dollars. But -- it's best to avoid Mexico at this time.

Posted by: julie | January 01, 2010 at 09:29 AM

Sad story, but why do Americans keep going down there? One girl gets killed in Aruba and people stop going there. At the same time, thousands get killed in Mexico and Americans keep going there. Cheap food? Alcohol? is it worth your life? When millions of Mexicans come to America that should tell you something. Good luck with the Mexican police doing anything. Most of them are employed by the drug cartels.

Posted by: Jim | January 01, 2010 at 09:43 AM

I don't know why anyone would go t Mexico now days..

RIP Bobby

Posted by: Bob | January 01, 2010 at 09:45 AM

People dont care. GANGs Dont Care. That is why they do what they do nobody cares. My Father Killed by MS-13 Members had nothing to do with anything in the world but, Honest , Hard worker and great father. Person whom committed the crime WALKED FREE AS A BIRD. Imagine that.

Posted by: dc | January 01, 2010 at 09:48 AM

This is horrible! I can't believe this happened. My condolences to his family - this is so sad.

Posted by: Kathy Yu | January 01, 2010 at 09:50 AM

So senseless. My condolences to his family and friends. He sounds like a really good guy.

Posted by: MikeOHara | January 01, 2010 at 09:52 AM

Presumably, the drug gang executioners kidnapped and murdered this guy and the other 4 because of some association with their drug gangs. So what is the association that led to this execution style slaying in Mexico? Seems there might be something missing in this report.

Posted by: Herbert444 | January 01, 2010 at 10:04 AM

Bobby, may you rest in peace. Such a tragedy, I worked with him last year and he had such a passion for his work and the students he worked with. He will be missed.

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Posted by: Suzanne | January 01, 2010 at 10:06 AM

I would hope the outrage would not be limited to El Monte. And although likely it won't be, it'll make no difference in Mexico. The drug cartels are too entrenched in making wealthy the politicians, that the senseless killing of an American educator and good person, in addition to the hundreds of Mexican citizens, will be of no consequence.

Posted by: Mufon | January 01, 2010 at 10:08 AM

This story makes me ill to read. I can't even imagine what they all went through. I've spent time in Mexico and love it so, but I will not travel down there due to the level of violence. If marijuana were legal here, would this violence stop??? Interested in hearing thoughts. Thoughts and prayers to family and friends.

Posted by: Lina | January 01, 2010 at 10:13 AM

It's about time we cut off all funding to this third world country and started shooting those sneaking across the border.

Posted by: Tony | January 01, 2010 at 10:14 AM

Close Our Borders

Posted by: Close Our Borders | January 01, 2010 at 10:15 AM

Isn't the USA violent enough already? Close the borders.

Posted by: Close Our Borders | January 01, 2010 at 10:16 AM

This is more than an outrage, this is murder of an American citizen! This has to be viewed as a direct attack on our nation. Where is the response from our political leaders, including the President? When American citizens are held or kidnapped anywhere in the world our national leaders are quick to respond, where is their outrage now? This story should have been front page news, not buried in the paper. Mr. Salcedo is not only a beloved, outstanding EL Monte educator, but an American citizen. The Mexican ambassador should have been called in asked for formal response from their President. I see nothing in the story that speaks to what our State Department, Secretary Clinton, is doing to assist the family. We have dropped the ball and are more concerned with New Year's celebration than our fellow citizens.

Posted by: Thomas Manning | January 01, 2010 at 10:33 AM

With news reports, and the justice department admonishing Americans not to visit, it should be taken seriously. As bad as the country needs individuals like Mr. Salcedo its not the time.

I think they could use the help of Spanish speaking American law enforcement, and military to go in and help them clean this mess up.

Posted by: SoCal | January 01, 2010 at 10:35 AM

Although I did not personally know Bobby Salcedo I am outraged by his senseless death. The community has lost a valuable asset in Bobby's leadership and his ability to inspire young people. My sincerest condolences to his family.

Posted by: JL Rotondo | January 01, 2010 at 10:42 AM

This cannot be random. Forces in El Monte have become corrupted. He was removed from power with the help of the connections within the gangs in El Monte to the traffickers in Mexico. People benefitting from this need to be looked at under a different glass

Posted by: Anonymous | January 01, 2010 at 10:43 AM

I would urge ANYONE considering traveling to ANYWHERE in Mexico including the resort areas to please reconsider. A cheap vacation isn't worth your or your family members lives. Mexico is one of the most dangerous countries in the world right now and if this article doesn't convince you of that, I don't know what will. It's the definition of a lawless country in the midst of a drug revolution.

Posted by: Tombo3 | January 01, 2010 at 10:44 AM

Mexico is an example of what happens when corruption is allowed to flourish for long periods. When the government adopted it isolationist policies in the 1930s and kept out foreign investment the economy stagnated and the general welfare of the population also stagnated. The politicians there still do not seem to be able to take steps to reform their economic policy.

Mexico is going to have to suspend civil liberties until they can clean out what has become a shadow government. They need to round up every single drug dealer and every one who has any ties to the drug trade, and do what it takes to get information out of them. The US needs to take the profit out of the drug trade by opening clinics druggies can get their fixes free. Let them kill themselves, just keep them off the roads.

Posted by: David_U | January 01, 2010 at 10:44 AM

He was 'vacationing' in Durango...the well known lawless drug center? I just wonder what the councilman was doing there? He couldn't have been in the trade could he? Just asking but perhaps someone in authority should too. Going to Durango for vacation is about like going to Kabul for the night life. Stupid at best.....

Posted by: Boils | January 01, 2010 at 10:49 AM

SoSad and Senseless!!! Evil MURDERS the BEST of Us!! FindthoseANIMALS and PUTTHEMDOWN NOWNOWNOW!! Mexico has had to ENDURE these DISASTERS toodamnlng!! WHERE ARE THE HEROS?!! WE NEED MOREMOREMORE!!!

Posted by: joe bananas | January 01, 2010 at 10:58 AM

What a great loss of an educator.

But I hope investigators do not just say raging drug war violence BS. Checking into this man's insurance policies may be enlightening. I and I am sure law enforcement do not believe in coincidence.

Posted by: Julian B Duron | January 01, 2010 at 11:02 AM

Well educated people never go into a war zone without security. I would not go to Mexico, and I am a tenth grade drop out. Sorry but some folks need to realize, war zone, no gun, or security, equals some one's death. Yes senseless death, but stupid on the victims part.

I had a friend that went with a group, and one woman was kidnapped, killed, and used for drug bag. They found her in a car propped up dead crossing the border. Mexico is a bad idea for a dinner date. Any body that dies in that country should have checked with the DEpartment of State travel guidelines. DANGER!! here is the link for those well educated folks to read. It could save your life.

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