



Testimony of

Teri March

Presented before the
Committee on Government Reform

Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug
Policy and Human Resources
Chairman Mark Souder

October 1, 2003

On April 29th, 2002, my day started like any other day. My husband, Deputy Dave March, got up at 4:30 am, to start work at 6:00am. He kissed me goodbye, and left for work. It was a beautiful spring day. I tried to call my husband around 10:15 am. I only got his voice mail. I knew he listened to the message, but I never was able to talk to him again.

Dave pulled over a vehicle around 10:40 a.m., in Irwindale, California. Unknown to my husband, the driver of the car, Armando "Chato" Garcia, had a 9mm handgun in his possession. During an attempt to pat down the driver, Dave was shot close range in the chest, in a gap where the vest did not provide protection. Before leaving the scene Armando Garcia turned and shot Dave point blank in the head. Garcia then fled the scene. Dave most likely died instantly. A Good Samaritan used Dave's radio to call for help.

Dave was rushed to Huntington Memorial Hospital. With all possible medical efforts, they were not able to save Dave. Dave went to be with the Lord- something he never feared. He often assured me of his conviction and love for God.

At the time of the incident, I was at work. My personal friend, also a Deputy, came to be my support. I was not aware of the severity of the situation as of yet. The Sheriff's Department was searching for my place of employment. I had just started this new job, in January. I was to hear the news that changed my life as I knew it...forever. I was told that he had been shot. I prayed and tried to stay positive, however, I knew in my heart, that it couldn't be good. I keep saying out loud, for Dave to "Fight honey, we need you, you're my partner, and I can't do this without you."

We arrived at the hospital and the expression on their faces told it all. I saw the sorrow in their eyes. I began to panic. The Los Angeles County Sheriff, Lee Baca, gave me the worst news I ever feared hearing. I had lost my hero.

I learned that the suspected killer had already fled to Mexico. I also learned that he had an extensive criminal history. He had been deported by the Immigration and Naturalization Service on three prior occasions for drug charges in California and was wanted for two other attempted murders. Armando Garcia should have been serving jail time the day my husband was killed.

Then the most devastating news, our detectives had a good idea where he might be in Mexico. But unfortunately, Mexico has a treaty with the United States that prevents the extradition of a murderer facing first-degree murder charges. The courts of Mexico are against life in prison or the death penalty. Because he fled to Mexico, he would be protected by this treaty. How outrageous! Armando Garcia committed the murder here, in the United States. This criminal chose to leave Mexico, and reside here in California. Why would Mexico push their views of justice on our county and on our family?

My husband lost his life protecting the residents of Los Angeles County. Dave was, for lack of other words, "sucker punched" by Armando Garcia. This evil man took my

husband's life – instead of leaving him wounded – to avoid prosecution. He shouldn't be rewarded with a lesser jail time just because he fled to a country (Mexico) that does not fully or properly punish murderers.

I feel it is only fair, that if you commit a crime in ANY country, you are accountable to their laws. I haven't met any person yet who disagrees with that sentiment.

Our ongoing efforts to plead our case to our elected officials, has accomplished little. Armando Garcia is still a free man in Mexico on "vacation", while our family is mourning the loss of wonderful and loving husband, father, son, brother and friend. We have made efforts to write to Congress, and to the President but our fight for justice has been very long and frustrating. This frustration is compounded daily by the knowledge that my husband's killer enjoys a life of freedom.

Thankfully, our District Attorney, Steve Cooley and his staff, have done everything in their power to secure justice. It has been a broken system, for many years, with little or no improvement. It might take years to fix, but in the meantime Mexico has not guaranteed our family any fairness or justice. It's uncertain what kind of punishment Garcia would receive. It is not uncommon for criminals to buy out their acquittals, or receive minimal jail time. He would then be free to return to the US and could possibly kill again.

In the meantime, I have gotten involved in fighting for justice. This man killed my husband, but I refuse to let him take my life away from me too. I am confident that in some way justice will prevail in this case. I will continue to expose my personal and private life so others will know how terribly broken our justice system is.

I would hate to think that this crime is going to be forgotten. I know I will never forget. I took my vows very seriously. I promised to honor and love my husband. I feel his contributions and his life stood for so much. His life made an impact on so many others. He was an honest, loving, fair, and a beautiful man. He had a smile that lit up a room. If I could be as lucky to touch lives like he did, in his brief 33 years, that would make me proud.

The only way I feel I can go on, is to know that Armando Garcia can not hurt another family. I know my husband was willing to die for his job. But, I know he did not take that risk so a killer could get away with cold blooded murder. Armando Garcia needs to be punished under the laws of the United States. This is the only resolution that is acceptable to my family and to me.

I am not the first victim that has endured this injustice. It is estimated that over 300 families in California alone are facing the same problems that I have with no closure or solution in sight. Many of these families have been waiting several years and many have given up. I do not want that to be me. I want to see justice for my husband's killer and will work diligently until it is achieved.

I have waited patiently for too long, writing letters, appealing to the media in order to educate the public about my story. I have spent the past year and a half doing whatever it takes to increase awareness. Today I am appealing to you for your help. You have the power to make a difference.

It is time for you, the leaders of our country, to step up! We need your involvement, and your efforts. Something needs to be done before the problems facing our nation's criminal justice system get even further out of control. I would hope that "votes and trade", would not get in the way of protecting our country. Our Federal Government and President Bush need fight for extradition, and punish those who commit heinous crimes on the soil of the United States. Please, don't let Mexico continue to be a safe haven for criminals. Our tax payers deserve much better.