

Local View: Minnesota stands up to ICE raids by 'neighboring'

From the column: "People told us, 'Minnesota is our Ukraine. If Minnesota falls, we all fall.' Minnesota did not fall."

By Colleen Feige and Ellen Kennedy

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This past winter was the worst we have lived through in Minnesota. Neither of us is a Minnesota native, but we both raised our families in Edina, Minnesota, and we've both lived there for nearly 40 years.

It wasn't the coldest winter or the snowiest — but it was the ICE-iest.

The administration of President Donald Trump took office on Jan. 20, 2025, and that first day launched executive orders to criminalize, detain, and remove unprecedented numbers of undocumented immigrants across the country. Words from The Guardian responded: "The persecution of brown people and mass deportations will not create the white country of far-right fantasy."

Policies and practices changed almost daily, creating fear and uncertainty among immigrants. The administration especially targeted Somali Americans, many of whom live in Minnesota and nearly all of whom are U.S. citizens. Much of the animosity toward Somalis seems to come from the president's public fixation on Congresswoman Ilhan Omar, a Somali Muslim woman who represents Minneapolis (and parts of our city of Edina).

The entire country seems to know the story of ICE in Minnesota, starting with the arrival of nearly 4,000 heavily weaponized federal agents and their illegal, unconstitutional roundups, arrests, and deportations of 5,000 people in Operation Metro Surge. Then there were the shooting deaths of two white citizens and the shooting of another and the roundups of more than 70 children at schools, homes, and bus stops and their imprisonments — including a 2-year-old.

Minnesotans were disappeared into the largest system of incarceration in the world, including into warehouses where they couldn't be found and had no access to lawyers — and where there was inadequate food, substandard sanitation, and, according to the American Medical Association, little or no medical care. At least 51 people reportedly have died, 10 of them by suicide.

The country also knows the story of people of color in Minnesota sheltering in terror; hiding from ICE and Border and Customs Patrol agents; not going to the grocery store, work, the doctor, or even vital hospital care — locked in, going nowhere, like modern-day Anne Franks.

There is also a third Minnesota story, of "neighboring," with people throughout the state — indeed, from throughout the country — bringing food, medicine, rent money, care, and compassion to those hiding in fear of the federal government. They helped people they never even met.

Operation Metro Surge was not only in Minneapolis, St. Paul, and the immediate suburbs. It happened throughout the state and across the country. More than 75,000 people are currently in warehouses and over 540,000 have been deported. The administration's goal is removing 1 million people a year, or about 2,700 a day.

We are members of the League of Women Voters (LWV), a national organization of 85,000 women, men, and gender-diverse people with a mission of protecting and preserving voting rights and safeguarding our democracy. ICE tears communities apart, weakening democracy and the rule of law.

We went to the national convention of the League of Women Voters in Columbus, Ohio, in late June to share the story of people in Edina standing up. We want people to know what they can do when their city, too, is under attack by the government.

Today, Edina has evolved from a town that was nearly 100% white to a more pluralistic community, with about 80% white residents, 7% Asian, and 7% Latino and Black. Edina residents created mutual-aid societies to bring food, medicine, and support to locked-in, frightened neighbors. They raised money for rent, drove children to school, blew whistles to sound alerts that ICE was present, and marched in demonstrations. The people of Edina stood up.

The city also took a stand. Edina partnered with a local organization, VEAP, or Volunteers Enlisted to Assist People, to administer emergency rental assistance and food support. Edina joined a regional nonpartisan coalition of more than 25 Minnesota cities, led by Edina Mayor Jim Hovland, to address the economic and community aftermath of the surge.

In Edina, our LWV chapter organized three "constitutional observer" trainings, facilitated by the national organization Indivisible. We held these free training events at a public space with careful security protocols. Participants learned to safely and legally observe and film ICE for evidence to use in future court proceedings.

Throughout the winter months of the ICE surge, we distributed red, plastic, pocket-sized "Know Your Rights" cards so people could inform officials they are exercising their right to remain silent, to refuse consent to enter without a judicial warrant, and to speak with a lawyer. The cards are free and available in over 50 languages. We distributed cards in languages spoken in our community by Edina residents and by people who come to Edina to study or to work in the hospitals, stores, businesses, restaurants, and other establishments. The cards are in Somali, Chinese, Hmong, Amharic, Russian, Spanish, Vietnamese, Arabic, and Dari and Pashto, the major languages of Afghanistan.

People told us, "Minnesota is our Ukraine. If Minnesota falls, we all fall." Minnesota did not fall. Nor did Edina.

What was the outcome of Operation Metro Surge? It cost the state of Minnesota \$700 million in lost revenue. Its cost in trauma is incalculable. The "neighboring," though, was democracy at its finest, and the residents of the Twin Cities received the prestigious John F. Kennedy Profile in Courage award.

But there must be accountability. In our view, the federal government violated four constitutional amendments — the Fourth, Fifth, 10th, and 14th — in the roundups, including illegal searches,

incarcerations, and deportations. In addition, three international human rights laws were broken, we contend: against ethnic cleansing; enforced disappearances; and refoulement, or sending people someplace where they fear persecution.

On June 11, ICE rounded up and removed two dozen Latino workers in Bemidji, Minnesota, demonstrating the ongoing danger of the anti-immigrant program here and around the country. Nationally, the New York Times reported on July 1 that federal immigration officials had detained more than 10,000 people over the previous five days, double the rate from the winter surge of 1,000 a day, with deportation still the apparent goal.

Several states have passed legislation to bring lawsuits against federal, state, or local agents for these violations. A bill was introduced in the Minnesota Legislature in 2026, the Minnesota Constitutional Remedies Act (SF 3843/HF 3477).

Legal accountability will bring “neighboring” to the next level: the level of justice.

Colleen Feige of Edina is president of the [League of Women Voters-Edina](http://lwvedina.org) (lwvedina.org) and first vice president of the [League of Women Voters-Minnesota](http://lwvmn.org) (lwvmn.org). Ellen Kennedy of Edina is a member of the board of directors for the League of Women Voters-Edina and is executive director of the human-rights organization [World Without Genocide](http://worldwithoutgenocide.org) (worldwithoutgenocide.org). They wrote this exclusively for the News Tribune.



Colleen Feige



Ellen Kennedy

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