

'I hate Mexicans,' Utah man shouted before attacking Latino father, son at tire shop

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Updated: Dec 3, 2018 - 11:14 AM

Link: <https://www.wsocvtv.com/news/trending-now/i-hate-mexicans-utah-man-shouted-before-attacking-latino-father-son-at-tire-shop/882498286>

SALT LAKE CITY - "I'm here to kill a Mexican."

Those are some of the words a Utah man is accused of shouting before he attacked a Latino father and son at the family's tire shop, beating the 18-year-old son so badly that he fractured his cheekbone and eye socket.

Alan Dale Covington, 50, is charged with two counts of aggravated assault resulting in serious bodily injury, two counts of aggravated assault and two counts of possession of a dangerous weapon by a restricted person, as well as misdemeanor drug charges, [Salt Lake County Jail records show](#).

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[The Salt Lake Tribune reported](#) that, despite Covington's alleged statements, which included how much he hated Mexicans and asking 18-year-old Luis Gustavo Lopez if he was a member of the Mexican mafia, Covington will not be charged with a hate crime enhancement.

Utah law has a hate crime statute, but it can only be applied to misdemeanor assaults, the Tribune said. All of Covington's charges stemming from the assaults are felonies.

"Although we want to pat ourselves on the back and say we have a hate crime statute, it's really not enforceable," [Salt Lake County District Attorney Sim Gill told the newspaper](#). "It's only applicable to the lower offenses and not the more serious. That's a shortcoming."

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The attack on Lopez, a Salt Lake Community College student, and his father, Jose Lopez, was a serious one.

Jose Lopez, 51, [told the Tribune](#) that he was heating up some of his wife's homemade chicken soup in the office of his shop around 9 a.m. Tuesday when he heard his son yelling from the garage. When he ran to see what was going on, he saw a man, who police later identified as Covington, in the courtyard of the shop, yelling slurs at his son and threatening him with a metal pole.

As the assailant began swinging the pole, Jose Lopez tried to shield his son. Luis Lopez grabbed a metal rod from a tool box and tried to defend his father, [the Tribune reported](#).

Luis Lopez was struck in the face and knocked unconscious, the newspaper said. His attacker kept beating him and Jose Lopez again shielded his son, suffering multiple blows to his arm and back.

Jose Lopez's brother heard the commotion and ran to help his family, scaring the attacker away. Covington, who police said harassed workers at a nearby hair salon before the attack on the Lopez family, was arrested that same day, [jail records show](#).

He was being held in lieu of \$100,000 bond.

Jose Lopez, who [talked to the Tribune through his daughter](#), Veronica Lopez, suffered a bruised back and required eight stitches to close a gash on his arm. Luis Lopez was put in the intensive care unit for several days.

[Court records obtained by KUTV in Salt Lake City indicate](#) that responding police officers found Luis Lopez "bleeding profusely from his face" and "gurgling and coughing on his own blood."

[According to a GoFundMe page](#) set up by Veronica Lopez, he required surgery to repair his face. His cheekbone and eye socket were shattered, and his sinus was collapsed.

The fundraising page shows photos of an unconscious Luis Lopez in the hospital, a cervical collar around his neck and tubes inserted into his mouth and nose. Blood-soaked gauze covers his right eye and his head rests on a bloodstained hospital gurney.

[Click here to go to the Lopez family's GoFundMe site](#). **Warning: the page contains graphic photos.**

"My brother's right side of his face was shattered," [Veronica Lopez wrote](#). "He had a three-hour surgery to place a titanium plate from the right side of his face to his nose, to be able to attach the bones and keep his eyeball in place, and a plate under that."

Neither father nor son had health insurance, the fundraising page said. As of Monday morning, the page had raised nearly \$52,000 in two days. The goal had been \$20,000.

Veronica Lopez [told the Tribune](#) that her father, who has kept the shop closed since the incident, is afraid.

"They're very shaken up," [she said of her family](#), whose sole source of income is the shop. "My family feels targeted."

[The Tribune reported](#) that in the 20 years that Utah's hate crimes statute has been in place, no one has been convicted for a hate-based crime. The state legislature has tried to reinforce the law multiple times, but all attempts have failed.

Salt Lake City police officials have said that Covington was under the influence of drugs during the attack. The probable cause affidavit [obtained by the Tribune](#) indicated that when he was taken into custody, he had on him a tinfoil pouch of heroin.

He also had the alleged weapon from the attack -- a metal bar that appeared to have been ripped off a traffic sign -- and a hatchet, the newspaper reported.

Covington has previous arrests for felony assault and domestic violence, including a June incident in which he is accused of punching his then-fiancée in the face and brandishing a handgun, [KUTV reported](#). Police officials said he also has a history of mental health issues.

Detective Greg Wilking with the Salt Lake City Police Department [told the Tribune Friday](#) that those issues may have “clouded (Covington’s) judgment” when he attacked Jose and Luis Lopez.

“He wasn’t really based in reality,” Wilking said.

Wilking told the newspaper that the responding officers, who based their report off Jose Lopez’s brother’s statement, wrote that Covington seemed to focus more on the Mexican mafia than his hatred of Mexicans. Covington told investigators he went to Lopez Tire to check for mafia members because, “All of them know each other.”

He told detectives “that the Mexican mafia had been after him since 2008,” [KUTV reported](#).

Wilking said that Covington may have had contact with the “notorious” prison gang in the past, [the news station said](#). Neither Jose Lopez nor Luis Lopez is affiliated with it or any gang, Wilking said.

Veronica Lopez [told the Tribune](#) that it “makes (her) blood boil” that Covington is not being charged with a hate crime.

“What do they want next?” [she asked](#). “Do they want him to kill someone to see that he’s dangerous?”

The Lopez family was [backed by the ACLU of Utah](#), which called the assault a “terrible attack against a person, a family and our sense of security from hate-filled acts in Salt Lake City.”

The organization condemned the attack and urged changes to the state’s hate crime legislation.

“When accompanied by free speech protections and applied without bias by prosecutors, we believe that hate crimes legislation can strike the right balance between responding to terrible acts against specific populations and guarding against the criminalization of speech or organizational membership that is unrelated to the crime,” [the organization’s statement said](#).