

Illegal Immigrant Charged in Murder of Missing College Student Mollie Tibbits

A 24-year-old man described as an illegal immigrant from Mexico was charged with murder on Tuesday after he led detectives to the body of a woman, believed to be that of a college student who went missing a month ago, in an Iowa cornfield, state investigators said.

Mollie Tibbetts, 20, who attended the University of Iowa, disappeared in July while jogging.

Authorities were awaiting test results to make a positive identification, Rich Rahn, special agent in charge of the Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation, told reporters.

Rahn declined to say whether investigators have determined how the woman was killed, saying that the state's medical examiner's office will conduct an autopsy on Wednesday.

The suspect, Cristhian Rivera, told investigators he had jogged near Tibbetts, who warned him she would call police if he did not leave her alone, Rahn said at a briefing. Authorities have also spelled the suspect's name Christian Rivera.

"He in turn chased her down and then, he tells us, that at some point in time he blacks out and then he comes to near an intersection (where) we believe he then placed Mollie," Rahn said.

After a lengthy interview, Rivera led detectives to the body of the slain woman, Rahn said.

U.S. Homeland Security officials said Rivera is an "illegal alien," and Rahn said investigators believe he is from Mexico.

President Donald Trump referred to Rivera's being in the country illegally during a campaign speech for a Republican U.S. Senate candidate in West Virginia.

"You heard about today with the illegal alien coming in, very sadly, from Mexico and you saw what happened to that incredible, beautiful young woman," Trump said.

Illegal immigration has been a lightning rod issue for Trump, who has repeatedly said illegal immigrants were responsible for many violent crimes.

Rivera was identified in security video taken from a camera outside a house in Brooklyn, Iowa, where Tibbetts was last seen alive, Rahn said.

Rivera's black Chevrolet Malibu appeared in the video, helping lead investigators to him, Rahn said. Tibbetts is also seen jogging in one of the clips from the surveillance camera, Rahn said.

The woman's body was found buried under corn stalks in a cornfield about 10 miles from Brooklyn, where Tibbetts was staying at her boyfriend's residence.

Rivera, who was arrested without incident on Monday, lived in Poweshiek County, where Brooklyn is located, for four to seven years, Rahn said.

If convicted, Rivera faces life in prison without a chance of parole. {eo}

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