

Annabelle Iten

Team ANAHEIM

Pueblo Police Officer Found Dead: Did Snow Do It?

PUEBLO, CO, March 14 - On Friday, in the Dennis Maes Pueblo Judicial Building, defendant Karen Snow faced a charge of murder in the first degree after her boyfriend, police officer John Murphy, was found dead on February 11th, 2023. Murphy had been with Snow and other police officers at Madden's Irish Pub that night, and then was seen leaving with Snow. Murphy was expected to be seen later that night, at a party held at fellow officer Phillip Stone's house, but he never made it. Instead, Murphy was tragically found dead outside of the house, covered in snow.

The court first heard from Kai Morrison, Murphy's friend and a bartender at Madden's Irish Pub. Morrison testified to witnessing a fight in the parking lot between Snow and Murphy that night. Getting emotional, Morrison testified that "the last time I saw John alive was in the parking lot at the pub". She also testified that she saw Murphy get into Snow's black Lexus SUV, and that later that night she saw the same SUV pull up at the Stones' house, but didn't see anyone get out of the car. In response, the defense pointed out that Morrison couldn't confirm whether Snow also got into the car at the pub. Finally, Morrison testified that the next morning she took Snow to the Stone's house to look for Murphy, and that Snow somehow knew exactly where to find Murphy's body, despite the heavy snow that had fallen the previous night.

Next, the court heard from Detective Jordan Mankiewicz. Mankiewicz, despite being the lead detective, arrived at the scene at 11:00am, a full five hours after the body was initially discovered, and arrested the defendant within 30 minutes of arriving on the scene. "The detective didn't rush to the scene, but he did rush to arrest my client," noted defense attorney Josephine

Coffee in her opening statement. The detective seemed to be completely incompetent, failing to maintain proper chain of custody, take photographs of the scene, or even record the interview where Snow supposedly confessed: “I hit him, I hit him, I hit him”. Mankiewicz admitted that he used a leaf blower to clear away snow from the crime scene, and also used plastic bags and red Solo cups to collect the physical evidence, including tail light pieces and samples of Murphy’s blood and hair, that were revealed underneath. Nevada Morales, an expert in police procedures, later testified that this was a breach of standard protocol, and that Mankiewicz made decisions in the investigation that “a reasonable detective would not have”.

Melvin, a senior crime lab technician, and London Holt, a forensics expert called by the defense, had little to agree about. They both analyzed the event data recorder of Snow’s car, which recorded a triggering event on the night of Murphy’s death, but while Melvin believes the slight jostle of the steering wheel was indicative of a pedestrian collision, Holt believes this indicates a collision with a curb. Furthermore, the defense pointed out that Murphy was 5’10” and was hit in the back of the head, questioning the probability of such a collision with a small SUV. In closing, prosecuting attorney Meg Stantiski asserted that hitting a curb would create two consecutive jostles, and that because there was only one sudden jolt, “there is only one conclusion: Mr. Murphy was hit”.

Because this is a charge of murder in the first degree, the prosecution had to prove that not only did Snow commit the murder, but also that she acted with intent and after deliberation. They must have convinced the jury beyond a reasonable doubt, and this doubt must not be “vague or speculative”, as prosecuting attorney Lily Biederman pointed out in her opening statement. Was the evidence presented enough to convict Snow? The court anxiously awaits the jury’s verdict.