

Pennsylvania governor's mansion targeted by arsonist attack

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On early Sunday morning, the Pennsylvania governor's mansion was struck by an arson attack as Democratic Governor Josh Shapiro and his family were sleeping. No one was injured in the attack and the suspect, 38-year-old Cody Balmer, a former Army reservist and out-of-work former vehicle mechanic from Penbrook, just north of the state capital Harrisburg, turned himself in to Dauphin County police later on Sunday.

According to an affidavit, Balmer was able to climb a perimeter fence surrounding the governor's mansion and break in through a window with a hammer. He explained to arresting officers that, had he been confronted by Shapiro, he "would have beaten him with his hammer." He threw a homemade Molotov cocktail into an adjacent room, starting a "substantial fire." He then threw another explosive device before making his escape.

Law enforcement told NBC that, "while security knew a breach had occurred on the sprawling property, the intruder managed to evade them while troopers went to ensure the governor's safety." Shapiro recounted at a news conference that he and his family had been woken by a police officer knocking on the door.

Balmer was arraigned before a judge on Monday and faces charges of attempted criminal homicide, burglary, terrorism and aggravated arson, among other offenses. He was denied bail and did not enter a plea.

Balmer has a history of mental health issues and run-ins with law enforcement. He served from 2004 to 2012 in the US Army Reserve as a construction worker. He never deployed and left the Reserves as a sergeant. The military has not revealed what the circumstances of his discharge were.

He was due to appear before court this weekend for

unrelated charges stemming from a domestic violence incident in 2023. He had "taken a bottle full of pills in an attempt to kill himself" during that event, states a court document. He allegedly turned violent against his wife and child when he was confronted about the pills. In 2022 he was sued by a mortgage lender and owed approximately \$117,000, which "several hardship factors," including personal injury and a divorce, had prevented him from paying down.

Christie Balmer, the suspect's mother, prior to the Sunday attack had sought to have her son's mental state involuntarily evaluated. She told the Associated Press Monday that "nobody would help" her last week when she tried calling authorities, fearing her son had gone off his medication. Authorities explained that he had articulated no known threat to himself or anyone else at the time.

According to dispatchers, at 2:50 a.m. Sunday morning, Balmer placed a call and confessed to the attack. He allegedly denounced the governor and said he "will not take part in his plans for what he wants to do to the Palestinian people." He stated he wanted to "stop having my friends killed," although it is unclear if this refers to the Palestinian people or if he is referring to friends in the military.

Police have seized all of Balmer's personal devices "that contain any of the following: the name of Josh Shapiro, reference to Palestine, Gaza, Israel or the current conflict in Gaza."

Police are investigating if there are religious and political motives behind the attack. Shapiro, who is Jewish, has denounced the college protests against the Gaza genocide, calling on authorities to disband encampments and invoking the political establishment's big lie that such protests are "antisemitic."

NBC reports that Balmer's social media indicates he has "staunch anti-government views, including negative content about former President Joe Biden and memes urging people to 'become ungovernable.'"

Another article notes he "made numerous posts complaining about the high cost of living in the United States. In Nov. 2022, he posted, 'Can't pay rent? Sell your f**** organs! No more organs? F**** die then this is America be grateful for the opportunity you had.'"

Southern-central Pennsylvania, an economically depressed region, has witnessed several outbursts of violence in recent times. In February, 49-year-old Diogenes Archangel-Ortiz opened fire at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center Memorial in Shiloh, killing two people and injuring six more. He allegedly had arguments with staff at the hospital following a visit to see a friend who was receiving care.



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