News



Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro speaks with investigators ahead of providing an update on the act of arson that took place at the governor's residence in Harrisburg April 13, 2025. A man accused of breaking into and setting fire to Shapiro's residence while the governor's family slept admitted to "harboring hatred" for Shapiro, and said he would have beaten the governor with a hammer if they had encountered one another, court records allege. (OSV News/Commonwealth Media Services/Reuters)

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Harrisburg, Pa. — April 15, 2025
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Catholic leaders and public officials condemned violence and called for peace after an alleged arson attack on the Pennsylvania governor's mansion in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

In a statement, Bishop Timothy Senior of Harrisburg called the attack a "heinous act" that "struck at the very heart of our shared values as a society."

Pennsylvania law enforcement officials arrested and charged Cody Balmer of Harrisburg with attempted murder, arson and terrorism, after they said he scaled an iron security fence surrounding the governor's official residence in the middle of the night, eluded police officers and broke into the mansion, where he set a fire.

In a social media post, Democratic Gov. Josh Shapiro said he and his family were awakened early in the morning of April 13 to "bangs on the door from the Pennsylvania State Police after an arsonist set fire to the Governor's Residence in Harrisburg."

"The Harrisburg Bureau of Fire was on the scene and while they worked to put out the fire, we were evacuated from the Residence safely by Pennsylvania State Police and assisted by Capitol Police," he wrote. "Thank God no one was injured and the fire was extinguished."

"Every day, we stand with the law enforcement and first responders who run towards danger to protect our communities," he said, adding he and his wife, Lori, "are eternally grateful to them for keeping us safe."

Law enforcement authorities found two broken glass beer bottles that had been filled with gasoline they believe Balmer used to start the fire, they said.

Pennsylvania State Police said the fire caused a "significant amount of damage to a portion of the residence." Photos released by the Pennsylvania state government showed damage to multiple rooms, art, a piano and furniture.

Shapiro, who is seen as likely to seek his party's nomination for president in 2028, also oversaw the law enforcement response to the assassination attempt against President Donald Trump in Butler, Pennsylvania, last year, when the former president and Republican nominee for 2024 held a campaign rally.

"This type of violence is not OK," Shapiro said at a press conference April 13 at the residence. "This kind of violence is becoming far too common in our society. I don't give a damn if it's coming from one particular side or the other, directed at one particular party or another, one particular person or another, it is not okay, and it has to stop. We have to be better than this."

In his statement, Senior said, "I want to unequivocally state that all forms of hate are unacceptable. They have no place in our hearts, our homes, or our communities. Such acts of violence and intolerance threaten the fabric of our society and undermine the principles of love, respect, and understanding that all people of faith are called to embody."

Authorities have not yet made a motive for the attack public. Shapiro, who is Jewish, had celebrated Passover the evening prior to the incident, according to a post he wrote on X.

"As Catholics, we must be committed to the eradication of any form of hatred, including antisemitism," Senior said. "I am saddened that any form of political violence, let alone violence that is motivated by an attempt to suppress or intimidate a family because of their religion, is found in our community — especially at this time that is so sacred to our Jewish brothers and sisters and also to all of us as Christians as we celebrate Holy Week."

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"Our prayers are with the Shapiro family and their guests, whose faithful observance of the sacred tradition of their faith was grievously violated by this act," he added. "We Christians must stand in solidarity with our Jewish brothers and sisters in all circumstances, but especially this year as the observance of the days of Passover

coincides with the most sacred days of the Christian Liturgical calendar, Holy Week, the week leading us to our Easter celebration."

"I call on all our Catholic faithful in the Diocese once again to be men and women of communion. Extend a hand of friendship and solidarity to those whose faith tradition, race or ethnicity is different from our own. Together, we can stand against hate and create an environment where love and acceptance thrive and the God-given dignity of every person is respected," Senior said. "As we pray for the Shapiro family and all those affected by this incident, let us also pray for the courage to confront hate in all its forms. May our actions reflect the love that binds us together and may we be instruments of peace in a world that desperately needs it."

"We must be deeply grateful that Governor Shapiro and his family are safe, and we must also pray for an end to violence, which goes against everything good about us as human beings," Bishop David Zubik of Pittsburgh said in a statement April 13.

Zubik said that "we should all be shocked at the reported act of arson at the residence of Governor Josh Shapiro and his family. Particularly during this Holy Week for Christians and Passover time for the Jewish people, we focus on the deep love that God has for all of us."

Pennsylvania Sens. Dave McCormick, a Republican, and John Fetterman, a Democrat, both condemned the violence.

"The horrific attack against [Shapiro] and his family is terrible," McCormick wrote on X. "This type of violence cannot be tolerated and the criminals responsible must be prosecuted for these deplorable actions."

Fetterman called the attack "truly appalling."

"Profoundly grateful that [Shapiro] and his family are unharmed, and grateful for the police and first responders for their quick actions," he said. "Whoever did this must be held to the fullest extent of the law."

Trump administration officials, including Attorney General Pam Bondi and Vice President JD Vance, condemned the violence.

"I am deeply relieved that Governor Shapiro and his family are safe, thankful for the first responders who arrived on the scene, and applaud the police work that resulted

in an arrest just hours ago," Bondi wrote on X.

Vance expressed gratitude the Shapiro family was safe in a post on X and called the incident "really disgusting violence," adding, "I hope whoever did it is brought swiftly to justice."