

# Political violence continues to flare

## Shapiro fire latest in series of incidents

Savannah Kuchar  
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — A 38-year-old Pennsylvania man has been charged with a list of crimes, including attempted murder, after setting fire to a portion of Gov. Josh Shapiro’s Harrisburg home early April 13.

Cody Balmer turned himself in, according to court documents, telling investigators he was “harboring hatred” for the governor. Records say Balmer said he would have beaten Shapiro with a hammer had he encountered the governor in the mansion. The arson attack is one in a string of politically charged violent moments during recent years.

“We are frighteningly divided,” Arndrea Waters King, daughter-in-law of slain civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr., told USA TODAY last summer. “We really are at odds in a way in which, actually I don’t think I’ve ever seen quite to this degree in this lifetime.”

On July 13, President Donald Trump, then a candidate for his second term, had been on stage for less than 10 minutes in front of a crowd in Butler, Pennsylvania, when gunshots rang out.

A bullet clipped Trump’s ear, and Secret Service agents rushed him off the stage. A spectator, Corey Comperatore, was killed. The incident sent shock waves and raised fears about escalating political violence. Trump himself spoke throughout the remainder of his campaign about the trauma he endured in western Pennsylvania.

“As a nation, we narrowly escaped the tragedy of a major nominee for president and former president being killed,” Jonathan Allen, NBC News reporter and co-author of “Fight: Inside the Wildest Battle for the White House,” told USA TODAY. “And that’s no small thing. If anything, it’s been understated in the public discussion.”

Two months after the fateful moment in Butler, Trump faced a second alleged assassination attempt, this time while golfing at his course in West Palm Beach, Florida.



A mob of thousands stormed the halls of Congress on Jan. 6, 2021, in an attempt to overturn the peaceful transfer of power. JON CHERRY/GETTY IMAGES FILE

“Whether you like (Trump) or not ... the violence is just out of control,” Christine Ramos of Mason, Michigan, told the Akron Beacon Journal, part of the USA TODAY network, last July.

**Supreme Court justices seek more protection**

The Supreme Court has sought millions from Congress for added protection, in response to what the court calls “evolving risks” to the nine justices and their families.

A flood of threats followed a leaked draft of the opinion that overturned Roe v. Wade, the landmark abortion decision, in June 2022. A California man who had allegedly made threats against Justice Brett Kavanaugh was arrested that summer outside his Washington, D.C.-area home, armed with a knife and gun.

“The law requires every judge to swear an oath to perform his or her work without fear or favor, but we must support judges by ensuring their safety,” Chief Justice John Roberts wrote in his 2022 annual report on the federal courts. “A judicial system cannot and should not live in fear.”

**Lawmakers, family members remaining at risk for violence**

Members of Congress are also facing surging threats in today’s tense climate. And the officials themselves are not the only ones in danger.

In October 2022, a hammer-wielding attacker broke into the San Francisco home of former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and assaulted her husband, Paul Pelosi.

David DePape, the 42-year-old assailant, called out “Where is Nancy?” upon entering the bedroom, according to reports at the time. Finding her absent, DePape went after Paul Pelosi instead, leaving him with a skull fracture and serious hand injury.

The attack led Capitol Police to call for more resources to better protect members of Congress.

“We believe today’s political climate calls for more resources to provide additional layers of physical security for members of Congress,” Capitol Police Chief Tom Manger said in a November 2022 statement.

The department has logged a steadily increasing number of “concerning statements and direct threats” toward lawmakers over the past decade, jump-

ing from almost 4,000 in 2017 to 9,474 in 2024.

House Majority Leader Steve Scalise, R-La., suffered a gunshot wound to the hip in 2017, when a gunman opened fire on a GOP congressional baseball practice. Former Rep. Gabby Giffords, D-Ariz, survived a mass shooting in 2011. Giffords was shot in the head, six people were killed and a dozen others were wounded during a constituent event in Tucson.

**2020 election raises tensions that spill into 2021 at Capitol**

Capitol Police had previously received a significant bump in funding, following the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol.

A mob of thousands, many bearing flags or apparel showing their support of Trump’s 2020 campaign, stormed the halls of Congress in an attempt to overturn the peaceful transfer of power. A demonstrator was shot and killed during the riot. One Capitol police officer died the next day from injuries sustained in the riot, and four other members of the force died by suicide following the attack.

As election denial, steered by Trump, ran rampant, local election workers across the country faced a barrage of violent threats, accusations of misdeeds and intense scrutiny from vigilantes during the 2022 midterm elections.

**Michigan governor targeted for kidnapping in foiled group plot**

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer became a target for anti-government sentiment in 2020, when more than a dozen members of a group intent on inciting civil war allegedly conspired to kidnap her.

The FBI announced in October 2020 it had made several arrests and foiled the plotted attack. Fourteen men were ultimately charged in association with the attempted kidnapping: Five were acquitted, while four pleaded guilty and five were convicted on various counts.

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