

Shapiro speaks out after arson attack: Nothing will deter me from practicing my faith

The fire at the Pennsylvania governor's mansion caused significant damage.

By [Giselle Ruhiyyih Ewing](#) 04/16/2025



The governor's mansion in Pennsylvania was set alight over the weekend, while Gov. Josh Shapiro and his family, along with guests and staff members, were inside. | Commonwealth Media Services/AP

The person charged with an arson attack on the Pennsylvania governor's residence committed the act because he thought Gov. Josh Shapiro was helping perpetrate ongoing violence against the Palestinian people, according to a police search warrant released Wednesday.

The warrant says the alleged arsonist, Cody Balmer, confessed to the crime, saying that Shapiro "needs to know that he 'will not take part in his plans for what he wants to do to the Palestinian people.'"

In a briefing Wednesday shortly after the warrant was made public, Shapiro, who is Jewish, said that although the attack was frightening for him and his family, "nothing" the assailant

“could do would deter me from doing my job as governor, nothing he could do would deter me from proudly and openly practicing my faith.”

Shapiro went on to call for condemnation of all violence across the political spectrum, saying, “This level of violence has to end.”

“I know that there are people out there who want to ascribe their own viewpoints as to what happened here and why. I know there are people out there who want to adopt their own political viewpoints, or their own worldview as to what happened and why. I choose not to participate in that,” Shapiro said. “I said after the assassination attempt on the president in Butler, I said in Altoona after we captured the individual who shot and killed a U.S. health care CEO, and I said on Sunday that this kind of violence has no place in our society, regardless of what motivates it.”

The governor’s mansion in Pennsylvania was set alight over the weekend, while Shapiro and his family — along with guests and staff members — were inside the residence. Balmer has been charged with several crimes, including attempted homicide, terrorism and arson. The fire caused significant damage to a dining room, but authorities have said no one was injured in the blaze.

Shapiro faced criticism from the left flank of his party over his support for Israel, particularly when he was under consideration to be then-Vice President Kamala Harris’ running mate. He said repeatedly that he supported Israel’s right to self defense in the aftermath of the Oct. 7 attacks, while also strongly criticizing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, calling him “one of the worst leaders of all time” who was not interested in finding peace. He also distanced himself from [an opinion piece he wrote in college](#) in which he called Palestinians “battle-minded” and said that “peace between Arabs and Israelis is virtually impossible,” emphasizing his support for a two-state solution.

The Pennsylvania governor slammed then-University of Pennsylvania President Liz Magill for a “failure of leadership” in [responding to reports of antisemitism at the school](#). In an [interview with POLITICO](#) in April 2024, he said it was “unacceptable” that campuses across America “can’t guarantee the safety and security of their students,” and compared a protest outside a Philadelphia falafel restaurant to “1930s Germany stuff” after protesters chanted accusations of “genocide.”

“We’ve seen a rise in antisemitism and Islamophobia,” Shapiro told POLITICO then. “I think it is incumbent upon anyone — a governor or anyone else — to speak and act with moral clarity when they see these issues.”

According to the warrant, Balmer said he made homemade Molotov cocktails out of old Heineken bottles and gasoline from a lawn mower and walked over an hour from his home

to the governor's residence to set it alight. Balmer said he scaled a fence, broke through two windows with a hammer and threw the Molotov cocktails inside.

Balmer had long struggled with mental health, according to his brother, [who told the Associated Press](#) that Balmer had been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and had been treated twice in a psychiatric facility, though he has rejected the diagnosis and declined medication.

Asked if he knew that the governor and his family were home at the time, Balmer allegedly said he was aware of the possibility. He added that he would have beaten Shapiro with a hammer if he had encountered the governor inside the residence.

The governor on Wednesday did not say whether he thought Balmer should face hate crime charges, responding to a reporter's question by saying the decision is "not my call."

Attorney General Pam Bondi told reporters at a briefing Wednesday morning that both she and FBI Director Kash Patel had spoken with Shapiro and that federal authorities would assist the state investigation. Bondi also called the attack "absolutely horrific," though she evaded a question on whether the attack constituted "domestic terrorism," a [term she has applied to vandalism of Tesla cars](#) during anti-Elon Musk protests.