

In May, federal law enforcement agencies made two arrests connected to civil unrest at the Eugene Federal Building in the beginning of this year. Soren Polzin, 18, and Ryan Bruce Gaither Jr., 37, appeared before a federal judge on May 5th and were released from custody pending future legal proceedings— marking the beginning of a long legal battle ahead.

During the last week of January 2026, protestors gathered at the Eugene Federal Building to speak out against ICE's extrajudicial murders of Alex Pretti and Renee Nicole Good in Minneapolis. From a candlelit vigil for Pretti on January 27th, to a protest declared to be a riot on the evening on January 30th, Federal Protective Services (FPS) indiscriminately used chemical weapons and less-than-lethal munitions on protestors, clearly-marked members of the press, and random pedestrians on the evenings of January 27th, 30th, and 31st.

In the following weeks, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) announced a criminal investigation into at least five individuals present at the Eugene Federal Building the night of January 30th, when one of the building's windows was broken. The public and law enforcement alike scrutinized whether it was protestors or FPS who smashed the window. Some outlets determined that the footage released to the public appeared that FPS broke the window, and indeed, the evidence shown in the video is almost impossible to dispute. However, an unsealed FBI criminal complaint that circulated in early May reinforced the FBI's determination to pin the broken window on the protestors.

On Tuesday, May 5th, 2026, the FBI conducted a search warrant at the family home of 18-year-old Soren Polzin for the charge of depredation of federal property. The criminal complaint, written by an unnamed FBI agent, relies on distant and dark security footage in attempt to tie Polzin to the events of January 30th at the Eugene Federal Building; alleging that

Polzin broke the window that led the Eugene Police Department to formally declare the assembly a riot. Of note, the complaint states that protestors “attempted to breach” the window, but no one actually breached the building.

Soren Polzin was arrested after his entire family, including his elderly grandmother, were put in handcuffs while FBI agents completed a search of their property. Polzin was released from custody the same day on a pretrial probation agreement, and a date for trial has not yet been set according to court documents.

FBI Portland Special Agent in Charge Doug Olson said in a statement that,

“This arrest marks a huge step forward in our investigation of the damage to the Eugene federal building on January 30, 2026. Violence and destruction of property jeopardize the rights and safety of all citizens. The FBI will continue to pursue individuals who exploit a situation to pursue violent, extremist agendas—anarchists and other agitators who set out to sow discord and upheaval.”

Olson’s statement embodies the Trump administration’s attitude towards individuals who oppose fascism; most recently reified in the 2026 United States Counterterrorism Strategy, where Trump ensured anarchists and antifascists —among other groups labelled as terrorists— that “We Will Find You and We Will Kill You.” This playbook of the state condemning those who protest state violence as violent themselves is not unique to Eugene, and is present in anti-ICE protest cases across the country— as seen with the Prairieland Defendants in Texas or the Spokane 9 in Washington.

Repression of dissent by prosecuting progressive activists is a tried and true strategy to quell movements. Law enforcement has historically weaponized trumped up charges to make examples of Eugene-based climate and land defenders, civil

rights activists, and other demonstrators against injustice. Most famously, the FBI hunted down members of the Earth Liberation Front in the so-called “Green Scare” of the early aughts. More recently, Lane County pursued charges against protestors from a May 29, 2020 demonstration responding to the murder of George Floyd by police in Minneapolis. While many charged by the Lane County District Attorney’s office tend to escape with just misdemeanor charges, activists face more intense charges and potential sentences when the FBI is involved.

Polzin, an 18-year-old with no prior criminal record, now faces a charge that could result in a maximum sentence of ten years in prison and/or a \$250,000 fine. The potential punishment for this case is not proportional to the alleged crime. Much like how the FBI hunted down Earth liberation activists and labeled them as terrorists, this case is less about property damage than it is about making an example of one individual to quiet a powerful movement for change. While May 29, 2020 protestors who were charged by the county escaped with mostly misdemeanors due to the defendant’s ages and lack of criminal records, Eugene Police still dedicated over a thousand hours to investigating trespassing, theft and property damage from that night. These two separate investigations into broken windows demonstrate the disparity in potential consequences for young suspects, but both show that law enforcement will spare no expense when it comes to investigating politically motivated property damage.

The affidavit reveals how the FBI spent months surveilling Polzin’s family in an attempt to link him to the events of January 30th. Through federal subpoenas to Lane Transit District and the social media company Meta; “open source/social media research”; information obtained from Oregon DMV, Oregon State Police, and Lane County Sheriff’s office; helicopter flyovers conducted by Department of Homeland Security over Polzin’s residence; and surveillance

operations conducted by the FBI of Polzin's residence and the family minivan, the FBI submitted a range of circumstantial evidence to U.S. Magistrate Judge Amy Potter in order to receive authorization for the May 5th search warrant.

But after months of labor, the FBI has only made two arrests since their investigation began on January 30th. It is unclear as of now what other leads they are pursuing, but the affidavit does elucidate the sheer amount of time and money the FBI had to pour into finding one teenager who, as the affidavit claims, allegedly did very little to cover their tracks. Further investigation will likely be slow-going; and while federal investigations tend to have chilling effects on the momentum of protests, quieting in the face of such repression is doing the adversary's job for them.

The investigation so far demonstrates that better operational security practices –from protest clothes to how we use technology before and after an action– can even further slow down investigations and prevent prosecution of both federal and local cases. While law enforcement's same playbook has been in effect for decades, antifascist tactics continue to evolve to be more resilient to repression. To ensure community safety against litigious fascists, it is imperative to pass these lessons down before an action occurs, rather than after an arrest is made.