



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on February 24, 2011

## Arson at Texas Governor's Mansion Tied to Anarchist Group

Texas Rangers have announced that they are closing in on an arsonist who tossed a Molotov cocktail into the Texas Governor's mansion in Austin in June of 2008.

The Texas Rangers serve as a division of the Department of Public Safety. DPS head Steve McCraw indicated that investigators have linked the arsonist to a group of anarchists known as Austin Affinity. Two of the group's members had previously pled guilty to making bombs during the September 2008 Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota.



But one of those men, Bradley Crowder, 25, claimed that the Rangers were barking up the wrong tree. He said he and his friends were simply a group of young activists who had pooled resources to travel from Austin to St. Paul, and were not organized. "It never existed," he insisted of Austin Affinity. "It's not a real entity."

Federal agents accused members of the anarchist circle of plotting to make firebombs at the 2008 Republic Convention and hurl them at police cars. Austinite Brandon Darby, an FBI informant who had traveled to Minnesota with Crowder's group, told authorities of the plot. In addition to Crowder, 24-year-old Guy McKay pled guilty to a firearms violation in the case, receiving a four-year sentence. Crowder served two years for aiding and abetting McKay, but claims he had nothing to do with the Austin fire.

Another Austin anarchist, Scott Crow, said the young activists who traveled to Minnesota in 2008 weren't a coherent group and split up after returning to Austin.

DPS head Steve McCraw told the *Austin American Statesman* Feb. 17 that one of the men arrested in Minnesota is one of three "[persons of interest](#)" in the mansion fire case, although the DPS does not believe he's the same man caught by surveillance cameras tossing the bomb on the mansion's porch.

The Rangers got a break in their case several months ago. Four days before the fire at the Governor's mansion, surveillance cameras had recorded three men in a white Jeep stopped on a street adjacent to the building around 2 a.m., snapping pictures of the structure. Video showed two camera flashes. Rangers believe the three men were casing the area. Because the video didn't capture the license plate number, a wearisome search of 3,000 similar Jeeps in Texas ensued. McCraw explained that the vehicles were eliminated one by one:

Every one of them had to be looked at. And it had to be done in a way that you are not letting the person know. It was good, old-fashioned police work. Sometimes it's the minutiae and the tedious that links you to something.

Investigators eventually identified the car and interviewed the owner, who was connected with Austin



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Affinity. The owner in turn named his passengers, one of whom was discovered to have been near the mansion at the time of the fire.

The Texas DPS has made sketches from the surveillance video and is offering a \$50,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the arsonist.

DPS spokesman Tom Vinger indicates there's quite a bit of interest from the public: "We have received [tips](#). We are investigating them as they come in."

The historic Governor's mansion, built in 1854 across the street from the State Capitol, has been home to every Texas governor since 1856, including the famous Sam Houston. The arson occurred while the mansion was in the middle of a \$10-million-dollar renovation. An additional \$25 million has now been set aside for its restoration.

In a related story, Texas Governor Rick Perry has incurred the ire of Texans by relocating during the restoration of the official residence to a mansion renting for \$9,000 a month — a sum many consider to be outrageous.

To residents of the Lone Star State, their Governor's mansion is a beautiful and treasured historic building, and arson is a serious crime. As they monitor developments in the case, they are grateful for the diligence of Texas Rangers.



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