

NEWS

Federal agents deploy pepper balls, tear gas and more against protesters at the downtown Eugene Federal Building

GASSED BY FEDS

BY EVE WESTON

Photo by
Eve Weston

At the downtown Eugene Federal Building, a loudspeaker on the roof played the message, “You are ordered to depart the area immediately.” Minutes later at approximately 7 pm, federal agents from both the Department of Homeland Security and a Customs and Border Protection Special Response Team (SRT) created chaos, throwing a flashbang into a crowd of protesters, then firing pepper balls and tear gas canisters.

A *Eugene Weekly* reporter — who was clearly marked as media and announcing herself as such — was struck by pepper balls in the leg and foot. Several other journalists — including reporters from Lane Community College’s *The Torch* — were either struck or affected by the irritants used.

The events began hours earlier around 12:30 pm when two peaceful protesters were violently arrested by the CBP and DHS agents while participating in the weekly interfaith Singing For Our Lives

Vigil in the plaza of the Federal Building. One of the protesters arrested was Anna Lardner, a plaintiff in a civil rights lawsuit against the Trump administration, Secretary of Homeland Security Kristi Noem and the DHS.

“They dragged me, they took me to the ground, they pulled me inside,” Lardner says of DHS and the SRT. “I believe this is retaliation for that lawsuit.”

The *Weekly* reported on the lawsuit in early December. A temporary injunction is currently in place against new rules regarding conduct on federal property, including a provision that prohibits “loud or unusual noise.” Several protesters used whistles, airhorns and megaphones.

As a result of her arrest, Lardner was scraped and bruised. “They kept tweaking around my arm and wrist in there,” she says. “At one point they sat on my ankles and splayed my ankles out and pulled my toes back.” Lardner, a transgender woman, says she repeatedly requested a female officer to conduct a search, but DHS officers refused.

“I said ‘I want a female officer to search me, don’t touch me,’” Lardner says. “Then they pushed my head into the wall, and I said, ‘Stop, that hurts.’” She says that agents said there was no female officer in the building, but after about five minutes, one did appear to conduct the search.

After the first two protesters were arrested, more people arrived as support and to protest against those seemingly unprovoked arrests. Another plaintiff in the civil rights case, Chloe Longworth, was pepper sprayed, but not arrested.

Later that day, after she had recovered from the pepper spray, Longworth was arrested by CBP agents when she re-entered federal grounds.

As protesters gathered, DHS and CBP agents intermittently rushed out of the building and without warning, grabbed protesters and took them inside. Some protesters say the agents appeared to target people with megaphones. Agents fired pepper balls during several of the arrests. Despite the agents’ use of force, protesters on scene remained nonviolent and unarmed, shouting expletives at agents and chanting “ICE OUT.”

Then, at 5 pm, members of the Oregon Nurses Association arrived in front of the plaza to hold a candlelight vigil for Alex Pretti, the intensive care nurse in the Minneapolis U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs who was shot and killed by federal agents Jan. 24 at an ICE protest in Minnesota. About 200 people, including Eugene Mayor Kaarin Knudson, gathered to honor Pretti’s life in the plaza as protests near the entrance of the Federal Building continued in the background.

Paloma Galindo, a registered nurse, says despite the aggression shown by federal agents, she showed up because “it’s not always going to be comfortable to stand up, but we all have a duty to do it.”

The vigil began with a man playing taps on a trumpet to honor Pretti’s service at the VA. “This is some of the darkest times in our history, and we’re living in it,” Galindo says.

After several vigil attendees — including the mayor and other representatives — left the area, about 150 protesters massed at the front doors of the federal building. There, federal agents ordered protesters to leave the property and a warning was played over a rooftop loudspeaker. The

crowd stayed put, shouting at an agent on the roof to “jump.” A laser was seen shining into the building from the crowd.

Without warning, CBP agents threw a flashbang from the front door and more than 20 agents stormed out of the building, firing pepper balls and tear gas canisters. The crowd ran away, later approaching the building again once agents had pulled back. Agents again fired tear gas and pepper at the crowd, pushing them back. One agent was seen firing canisters that landed in the street.

Several protesters reported bruising from the pepper balls, including LCC’s *The Torch* reporter Agostinho DaSilva, who was shot six times. University of Oregon journalism professor Dan Morrison was also affected by tear gas on scene.

In an email to *Eugene Weekly*, Sen. Ron Wyden writes, “Trump’s ICE and CBP agents have clearly been trained in fear tactics instead of legitimate law enforcement. I’m calling on ICE and CBP agents in our streets to stop provoking peaceful observers and to get out of our communities.”

Federal agents retreated once again and the crowd slowly followed until they were at the front doors. There, a crowd of around 40 people chanted “let them go.” One person was released from the building. The crowd continued to chant until federal agents announced that all detainees had been released. Around 10 to 20 people then stayed there until approximately 10 pm.

According to protesters, several Eugene Police Department officers were seen in the area, including a mobile response team wearing riot gear; however, Eugene police did not engage with protesters or federal law enforcement.

In an email to *Eugene Weekly*, spokesperson Melinda McLaughlin writes that EPD, “a service of the City of Eugene, does not participate in federal immigration enforcement. EPD is legally prohibited from doing so under both state law and local ordinance. EPD serves every resident and visitor, including the immigrant community.”

She writes that EPD responses in the area were to support the Eugene Springfield Fire Department with medical calls and “to ensure safety and preservation of nearby public and private property.”

slant — Shot and sprayed

BY EW EDITORIAL STAFF

>> We are appalled by what is going on under the Trump administration. Alex Pretti, a nurse, was killed in cold blood only weeks after ICE killed Renee Good. Immigrants and others are targeted for the color of their skin or their accents, and federal officers descended upon a local Jan. 27 protest and vigil with tear gas, tasers and pepper balls. The agents targeted people exercising their First Amendment rights — going after participants at an interfaith singing event, protesters with megaphones and credentialed journalists. Two *Eugene Weekly* reporters were struck with pepper balls and other deterrents while covering

the protest, leaving the scene, shouting they were press and holding up their credentials. Reporters from almost every news source in town were affected — including from Lane Community College’s *The Torch* and the University of Oregon’s *Daily Emerald*. Stand up for free speech and transparency, support immigrants, support your community and support a free press. See videos and photos at EugeneWeekly.com.

>> As a newspaper, the *Weekly* is often asked to run anonymous letters and sources. We try to avoid that because we seek to be transparent. If someone asks to be anonymous, we ask why — and if someone is anonymous, we say why. To be anonymous, someone would need to

have a genuine fear of danger or repercussion. We won’t print someone’s name if they requested anonymity — if we deny the request, we simply are not going to quote them or print the letter. There are places from Reddit to Facebook where folks can weigh in and hide who they are, but in the era where ICE agents wear masks while killing protesters, we shine a light on truth — we get the fear, we are targeted too — but democracy is worth it.

>> On a lighter note, did you see someone at a recent protest you feel a connection with? Pass someone smelling like patchouli in the aisle at Kiva or Capella that you just need to compliment? Place a free I Saw You ad in Eugene Weekly’s classified section for the Feb. 5 Love and

Sex issue by emailing ISawYou@EugeneWeekly.com.

>> Nationally published queer Eugene-based photographer Sophie Spinelle debuts her newest exhibition *True to Form* on Feb. 5 at Imperfecta Gallery in Portland. Spinelle created *True to Form* in response to the Trump administration’s attempts at restricting gender-affirming care as well as other attacks on the LGBTQ community. The series is a collection of portraits that presents queer and trans subjects who collaboratively shaped their individual shoots, having agency over how they are represented in a time where the Trump administration frames them as dangerous and extremist. For more, check out EugeneWeekly.com.