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Mayor Tells Police Bureau to Let Feds Handle ICE Protest

By Alex Zielinski

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Protesters calling for the end of Donald Trump's "zero tolerance" immigration policy have successfully shuttered a Portland US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office for the second day in a row. It's now the fifth day of the organized campout at the Southwest Waterfront office building, one that's grabbed national headlines for its results.

While Department of Homeland Security (DHS) officers have arrested at least one of the protesters (for blocking a ICE vehicle)—there's been little response from the Portland Police Bureau (PPB), a department that's known for regularly showing up at Portland protests ready for battle.

Mayor and Police Commissioner Ted Wheeler says that's intentional. Yesterday, Wheeler announced he wouldn't be asking PPB to engage with ICE—a federal agency he believes is "on the wrong track." According to his office, this is also what he's telling PPB Chief Danielle Outlaw.

"While the mayor can't give tactical direction to the police bureau, he has given strategic direction," says Michael Cox, a spokesperson with Wheeler's office. "His thinking is, 'This is a federal agency on federal property with its own law enforcement agency, and we don't need to get involved.'"

However, Cox adds, that doesn't mean PPB won't show up if they're called. But that call won't be coming from the mayor's office.

Wheeler's response is a considerable contrast from the way PPB handled last year's protest in front of the same exact ICE building. In that case, protesters who sat chained together in ICE's driveway were arrested in less than four hours by PPB officers.

Meanwhile, when protesters blocked the ICE driveway for four hours on Monday, PPB officers only showed up to help escort ICE workers from the office to their car.

Yesterday, members of the Democratic Socialists of America sent a letter to Wheeler and the rest of the city council asking for them to uphold the city's status as a "sanctuary city" by not lending resources to ICE to help break up the protest.

As for now, that seems to be the case. But will Wheeler answer the group's request to visit the campout?

"He has no plans as of now," Cox says.