

What's next for Minneapolis? A shaky promise, mounting tensions and the fight for control



By Alaa Elassar

Ryan Strandjord never imagined he would see the day his treelined, lake-dotted hometown, the quintessential image of the American idyll, morphed into a battleground.

His house in Minneapolis sits between two neighborhoods stained by bloodshed where Renee Nicole Good and Alex Pretti were killed by federal immigration officers during a surge of immigration enforcement that has ignited outrage and protests across the country.

Both were US citizens, and their deaths have become rallying points for a city struggling to make sense of the violence unfolding on its streets.

“I don’t think that ‘battlefield’ is a stretch to call what’s happening here, simply because when you look at the images of ICE and the way that they represent themselves, the way that they interact with the public, it very much feels like a military occupation,” Strandjord told CNN.

Minneapolis is at an inflection point. White House border czar Tom Homan said Thursday federal officials are working toward an eventual drawdown of immigration enforcement as part of Operation Metro Surge – the federal immigration operation that has seen thousands

of agents dispatched to Minnesota’s Twin Cities and two Minnesotans killed – even as the Trump administration sends mixed signals about whether agents will actually pull back.

Meanwhile, in Minneapolis neighborhoods once alive with the pulse of immigrant communities, an anti-immigrant operation that has fractured families, rattled worried neighbors and left residents feeling unsafe shows no sign of slowing.

On these blocks, darkened by the presence of heavily armed federal agents, Minnesotans describe routine movements as calculated risks, unsure which block might erupt into confrontation.

“Even if you’re not feeling like you’re in hiding, you know someone that is,” Strandjord said.

“When you think about an occupation or a battlefield-like scenario, it extends far beyond physical fighting, and it pervades society in a way where kids aren’t going to school, people aren’t leaving their homes. There’s just overall, at times, a feeling of fear and dread,” he added.



People alert the neighborhood that federal agents are in the area on January 29, 2026, in Minneapolis. (AP Photo/Adam Gray)



Federal immigration agents stand guard after one of their vehicles was involved in a crash while making an apprehension on January 31, 2026 in St. Paul, Minnesota. Scott Olson/Getty Images

Homan has offered no clear timeline for scaling back federal operations.

“In a lot of ways, it feels like the front line on the fight against fascism, and that we need to do something to rise to the occasion,” Strandjord said.

As tensions deepened, the consequences spread beyond the streets. Two journalists were arrested after livestreaming as dozens of anti-ICE protesters rushed into Cities Church in St. Paul on January 18, raising serious alarms about First Amendment violations. And while one Minnesotan’s death is being investigated, the other’s family has announced they intend to seek answers on their own. So, what’s next?

Residents remain skeptical of promised ‘drawdown’

Many residents in Minnesota are doubtful of Homan’s claim that federal immigration authorities are preparing a drawdown plan for law enforcement in the state.

Homan, who was deployed by the Trump administration to Minneapolis to replace Border Patrol official Gregory Bovino following the fatal shooting of Pretti, said operations on the ground will be targeted, adding he’s “staying ‘til the problem’s gone.”

But President Donald Trump appeared to contradict him within hours.

Asked if he'd be pulling back immigration agents, Trump said, "We'll do whatever we can to keep our country safe." Pressed again on whether he was pulling back, Trump said, "No, no. Not at all."

"Any left-wing agitator or criminal illegal alien who thinks Tom's presence is a victory for their cause is sadly mistaken," White House spokesperson Abigail Jackson told CNN. "The entire administration, from President Trump to Tom Homan, has been clear: while criminal illegal aliens remain our top priority, anyone in the country illegally is eligible for deportation."

In South Minneapolis, a resident named Christine who declined to share her last name said she has seen no evidence that any drawdown has yet begun.



White House border czar Tom Homan enters the room for a conference at the Bishop Whipple Federal Building on January 29, 2026, in Minneapolis. (AP Photo/Julia Demaree Nikhinson)

"In fact, in my neighborhood, there are more ICE officers out today while Homan was speaking," she said, adding she's called legislators to report what she sees as an escalation, not a pullback.

Christine also told CNN her daughter was arrested Thursday while peacefully protesting. "We have video that shows that she was not a threat to anyone," she said. "American

citizens who are exercising their constitutional rights are getting picked up and arrested by ICE and detained. I want the rest of the country to hear that.”

Strandjord agreed, noting so far, he has felt no change since Homan’s comments.

“Homan saying that the force would be reduced eventually doesn’t mean anything, at all,” he said. “I think that the administration is so focused on the optics of the situation, but I don’t anticipate the force being withdrawn.”

Drawdown allegedly relies on jail cooperation

For weeks, federal and state officials have exchanged barbs over the issue of ICE detainers, which allow ICE to take custody of incarcerated immigrants.

DHS has said there are about 1,360 people with ICE detainers in Minnesota prisons and jails. But the Minnesota Department of Corrections says there are only about 300 such people in state and county custody.

“They continue to publicly repeat information that is inaccurate and misleading. This is no longer simple misunderstanding,” Paul Schnell, commissioner of the Minnesota Department of Corrections, said on January 22. The Minnesota Department of Corrections has identified at least 68 false DHS claims, according to a release published last week.

ICE official Marcos Charles suggested detainers sent to “the state’s jails and prisons” weren’t being honored. He later acknowledged the state Department of Corrections had fully cooperated but said most local sheriffs had not.

Minnesota Attorney General Keith Ellison has said state law requires state and local authorities to share information with federal immigration authorities on non-citizens convicted of felonies, but county jails cannot hold people beyond their release date.

“The DOC has always complied with lawful detainers. But the reality is, some sheriffs operate in complex legal environments,” Schnell told CNN in a statement on Sunday.

“If ICE wants a consistent process across counties, judicial warrants, as suggested by sheriffs who have been sued in the past, are the answer,” Schnell added. “That’s one small step that makes everything cleaner and more lawful, and ensures the focus remains on high-priority individuals.”

CNN has reached out to sheriffs in counties across Minnesota but has not received a response.

On Thursday, while addressing concerns about the “law enforcement manpower” in Minnesota, Homan said if state and local officials granted local jail access to federal officials, agents would be reassigned from street operations – which have drawn heavy criticism for their severe and sweeping tactics – to jails and prisons.

“More agents in the jail means less agents in the street,” Homan said. “This is common-sense cooperation that allows us to draw down on the number of people we have here.” Homan did not specify when a drawdown of agents in the state would begin.

The lack of communication regarding the criteria ICE uses to find their targets and “no command clarity” about their tactics is “alarming,” both for the DOC and every law enforcement leader in Minnesota, Schnell told CNN.

“Our biggest concern right now is that we still don’t have a clear federal plan: no drawdown timeline, no answer on an independent investigation that includes the state’s BCA, and no end to the federal government’s campaign of retribution against Minnesota,” Schnell said.

Investigations into the shootings of Good and Pretti

The Justice Department has opened a civil rights investigation into the Pretti shooting, US Deputy Attorney General Todd Blanche announced Friday. The probe will examine whether Department of Homeland Security officers violated the law in shooting the 37-year-old ICU nurse.

The announcement marks an expansion of the federal government’s investigation into the matter.

“The family’s focus is on a fair and impartial investigation that examines the facts around his murder,” an attorney for Pretti’s family, Steve Schleicher, said in a statement to CNN on Friday.

Pretti’s death has been ruled a homicide, according to the medical examiner’s office in Minnesota’s Hennepin County. The cause of death, the public form released by the office says, was multiple gunshot wounds, noting Pretti was “shot by law enforcement officer(s).”

A homicide ruling means the death was caused by another person, as opposed to being an accident, a suicide, natural or undetermined. Medical examiners’ homicide findings make no comment on whether the killing constitutes a crime.

The FBI is now leading the investigation into the shooting of Pretti, taking over from DHS’s investigative agency, a senior DHS official confirmed to CNN.

US Customs and Border Protection is also conducting an internal probe into the shooting.

“I don’t want to overstate what’s happening,” Blanche said. “I don’t want the takeaway to be that there’s some massive civil rights investigation that’s happening.”

“All that that means is that (DHS), ... as the secretary has said, is conducting an investigation, as they should, and as they do every time there’s a tragic event like this,” Blanche said. “And the FBI, in their role, which is a separate role from DHS, is also ... looking into it and conducting (an) investigation.”



Flowers and photos are left at a memorial site for Renee Good on January 31, 2026, in Minneapolis. (Alex Brandon/AP)

However, the Trump administration has made it clear it has little interest in a broad investigation into the fatal shooting of Good, who was a mother of three. Before Good's body was even turned over to her family, the Trump administration announced her fatal shooting by an ICE agent was in response to "an act of domestic terrorism."

Vice President JD Vance defended the agent involved, saying at a White House briefing the officer is "protected by absolute immunity" from prosecution, a characterization that many legal experts have challenged.

The Department of Justice also stopped investigating the agent, Jonathan Ross, and federal authorities blocked state investigators from participating in the probe. The DOJ's Civil Rights Division also said it would not open a civil rights investigation. Blanche said the division "does not investigate every one of those shootings" and there must be specific circumstances or facts that warrant such a probe, a position that contradicts his earlier statement that DHS investigates every time "there's a tragic event like this."

Good's family has hired the law firm Romanucci & Blandin, the same lawyers who represented George Floyd's family. Their attorneys say they "anticipate bringing legal action" over allegations including excessive force and negligence, and demanding evidence be preserved.

“The community is not receiving transparency about this case elsewhere, so our team will provide that to the country,” said the law firm.

“We need to know based on the totality of circumstances – not only looking at the video, but also looking at the intent that was there, looking at reasonable police practices,” family attorney Antonio Romanucci told CNN.

The courtroom battles shaping what comes next

A judge ruled Saturday that Operation Metro Surge can go on as a lawsuit continues against the federal administration.

Minnesota, St. Paul and Minneapolis sued federal officials last month, calling their immigration enforcement operation a “federal invasion” involving warrantless arrests and excessive force.

DHS celebrated the ruling, calling it “a win for public safety and law and order” in a statement to CNN Saturday.

In the ruling declining the plaintiffs’ motion for a preliminary injunction, US District Judge Katherine Menendez noted evidence federal agents have “engaged in racial profiling, excessive use of force, and other harmful actions” and the operation’s negative impacts throughout the state, ranging from “the expenditure of vast resources in police overtime to a plummeting of students’ attendance in schools, from a delay in responding to emergency calls to extreme hardship for small businesses.”



Federal agents approach a vehicle on January 29, 2026, in Minneapolis. (Adam Gray/AP)

She acknowledged the plaintiffs “have made a strong showing that Operation Metro Surge has had, and will likely continue to have, profound and even heartbreaking, consequences on the State of Minnesota, the Twin Cities, and Minnesotans.”

Still, Menendez said the harms of the operation must be balanced with the harms an injunction would pose to the federal government’s efforts to enforce immigration law.

Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey said he and other city officials were “disappointed” with the ruling.

“This decision doesn’t change what people here have lived through — fear, disruption, and harm caused by a federal operation that never belonged in Minneapolis in the first place,” the mayor said in a statement.

The city will continue to pursue the lawsuit “to hold the Trump administration to account,” the statement said.

A separate lawsuit has also been filed by the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension and Hennepin County Attorney’s Office against the federal government seeking to preserve evidence in the investigation into the fatal shooting of Pretti.

On January 24, a federal judge in Minnesota granted a temporary restraining order blocking federal agencies from destroying or altering evidence related to the shooting, but a final decision on whether to extend that protection is still pending after a hearing in court was scheduled last week, and no ruling has been issued yet.

In court filings, federal officials contend the BCA's lawsuit should be thrown out, claiming the government is preserving evidence and state authorities lack a "constitutional right to dictate the federal government's evidence-preservation procedures, particularly procedures involving an immigration-enforcement incident," CNN affiliate KARE reported.

A city on edge, holding itself together

Fear, anger and solidarity are colliding across Minneapolis, as residents describe a city where daily life now relies on warnings and mutual care.

Strandjord says many immigrant families in his neighborhood are staying inside, too afraid to leave their homes, while immigrant-run restaurants have closed or are operating with skeletal staff because workers are afraid to come in.

In response, Strandjord and others have organized food and supply drives through a local café, delivering essentials directly to people sheltering at home.

"People are out in the streets because they're afraid their neighbors are going to disappear," he said. "And we're not going to tolerate that."



Sheriff deputies push back protesters that had filtered onto the street in front of the Bishop Henry Whipple Federal Building in Minneapolis on January 30, 2026. (Renee Jones Schneider/The Minnesota Star Tribune/Getty Images)

Strandjord described federal agents “roaming the streets,” approaching people at gas stations and waiting near bus stops — places parents rely on to get their children to school.

“Being a parent in this kind of situation just kind of compounds the challenges, because you are aware of what’s going on, you feel compassion for people that are suffering, but that’s not something that we want our son to feel or experience,” Strandjord said.

For many, the killings of Good and Pretti were not isolated tragedies, but the most visible flashpoints in a broader pattern. Strandjord pointed to mounting cases in which US citizens have been detained while protesting or exercising First Amendment rights, including the rights of journalists.

“Even though we’re citizens and we don’t feel like we’re the type of people that they’re looking for, it simply feels like you could be in the wrong place at the wrong time,” Strandjord said.

That sense of collective unease was palpable at a recent benefit concert for the families of Good and Pretti, where rock legend Bruce Springsteen and Rage Against the Machine guitarist Tom Morello took the stage. Morello performed “Killing in the Name,” the 1992

protest anthem against police brutality — a moment attendee Diane Miller described as cathartic and defiant.

“I’ve never experienced this level of fascism coming directly where I live,” Miller, who also attended a large protest Saturday, told CNN.



Activists gather in protest to light candles on frozen Lake Nokomis, spelling, "ICE Out" on Saturday, January 31, 2026, in Minneapolis. (Alex Brandon/AP)

She said she heard about a woman who was followed and photographed after leaving a vigil for Pretti — an experience that deepened her anxiety. “It feels like any action you take against the administration puts you at risk of being arrested or blacklisted,” she said. “It feels very George Orwellian.”

Miller said the rhetoric surrounding the protests has only heightened tensions, particularly language labeling Minneapolis residents as “radical left-wing domestic terrorists.”

“That kind of language feels outrageous,” she said. “We’re scared, we’re fed up — but I’m also proud of this city. No one thinks one protest will fix everything. This is a slow game.”

For now, Minneapolis residents say they are doing what they can: showing up, watching out for one another and refusing to look away — even as fear settles into the fabric of daily life.

CNN’s Andy Rose, Elizabeth Wolfe and Zoe Sottile contributed to this report.

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