

# WisDems: ICE has come to Wisconsin

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**MADISON, Wis.** — On Friday, [new reporting](#) revealed that ICE crossed the Mississippi and infiltrated Hudson and Baldwin, Wisconsin. Even before ICE put boots down in the state, local residents in St. Croix were calling out their un-American militant campaign that forced multiple businesses to close out of fear.

“The chaos, fear, and division is exactly what the GOP wants; they want to divide and conquer us,” said Democratic Party of Wisconsin spokesperson Philip Shulman. “They are deliberately stoking chaos to force communities to pick sides, shutter businesses, and scare people into staying quiet. Wisconsin Republicans have been begging for ICE to come across the border, so whatever chaos follows is completely on them.”

**Wisconsin Examiner:** [Twin Cities ICE presence extends into Wisconsin](#)

By: Henry Redman | 2/6/26

*Hours after White House border czar Tom Homan announced Wednesday morning that the Trump administration would be pulling 700 immigration agents out of Minnesota, agents crossed the St. Croix River to conduct a number of raids in the Twin Cities exurban communities of Hudson and Baldwin, Wisconsin.*

*Those operations included the arrest of immigrants at the St. Croix County Courthouse in Hudson and a Mexican restaurant in Baldwin. In prior weeks federal immigration agents have regularly crossed the river, arresting people working at small manufacturing operations and gas stations, ranging as far east as Eau Claire.*

*While Wisconsin has seen an increase in immigration enforcement since President Donald Trump took office last year — as well some high profile cases such as the arrest of a migrant at the Milwaukee County Courthouse that sparked the federal felony charges against former Judge Hannah Dugan — the level of ICE action in the*

*state has been lower than in the neighboring states of Illinois and Minnesota, where the Department of Homeland Security launched massive operations targeting migrants in Chicago and Minneapolis/St. Paul.*

*Ben Nelson, a St. Paul resident who serves as the pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Woodville and works as a coach on the track team at Baldwin-Woodville High School, said that when students returned to classes after winter break, as many as 50 households in the school district had seen at least one parent taken by federal agents.*

*On Wednesday, several ICE agents arrived at the St. Croix County Courthouse and went inside to arrest immigrants who were in the building for court hearings.*

*Agents also raided Rancho Loco Mexican restaurant in Baldwin, where four members of the staff were arrested.*

*“Within the last 48 hours, we probably had another 10 people taken from Baldwin,” Kimberly Solberg, a Baldwin resident who has been involved in local support networks, said Wednesday evening. “We are a small town, but they’re still doing the raids here, taking two, three, five, eight people at a time.”*

*Since ICE increased its Minnesota presence in December, these Wisconsin communities have been living in the shadow of the chaos caused by the immigration enforcement surge across the border. Residents work, shop and get their health care in Minnesota — including at the Veterans Affairs hospital where Green Bay native Alex Pretti worked before he was killed by federal agents Jan. 24.*

*While the presence of ICE in the Twin Cities has galvanized resistance in the largely blue urban area, the operations in western Wisconsin are deeply dividing residents in a solidly Republican county.*

*“The vitriol is so so thick, and the divide is so deep that people on one side, in the local minority, who are trying to do what they can to protect their neighbors, to support their neighbors, or just call for calmness and peace — which even calling for empathy, calmness and peace is radical leftist nonsense at this point,” Solberg said. “They’re terrified. People speak in code, there’s like signals, winks and nods. Everybody tiptoes around to suss out whether or not the person they’re talking to is safe because they’re so scared of how people react.”*

*Nelson, the Woodville track coach and pastor, said the lack of trust in the community is affecting how people are responding.*

*"There's some really just strong opinions ... it's sort of difficult to know who you can trust, because there is a significant amount of people who believe that ICE is operating lawfully and doing the right thing, and will support them in those efforts," Nelson said. "So honestly, I think we're just still figuring it out as we go, figuring out how to speak and what we can do."*

*Some networks that are helping western Wisconsin's current immigrant communities were established when Hmong and Vietnamese refugees first arrived in the region after the Vietnam War, according to River Falls resident Ellie Richards.*

*"There is a caring community here who is trying to provide the support we feel like these wonderful souls need," Richards said. "We view them as an asset to our community. None of us feel the least bit threatened by their presence, despite what the federal government may try to tell us."*

*But the best way to respond has been unclear because of the political divide in the rural communities and the fact that there are fewer people nearby to rush to the scene when immigration agents are conducting an arrest.*

*On the evening of Jan. 28, about 50 residents of Baldwin met in sub-zero temperatures at a park to hold a candlelight vigil for Pretti and Renee Good. Residents of the small rural community lamented that ICE's presence in St. Croix County has caused immigrant-owned businesses to close — including the local Mexican grocery store, Thai and Indian restaurants.*

*Other area residents have been driving across the border to join Minnesota's protests against the federal immigration enforcement crackdown.*

*'We don't have the numbers and support'*

*In the Twin Cities, the presence of ICE agents often sparks an immediate response from neighbors who come outside to observe and make noise in an effort to deter an arrest. In rural Wisconsin communities, there are often fewer people in the immediate area who can respond in the same way.*

*Even when responders arrive on the scene, they often don't have enough people to feel comfortable standing up to the federal agents.*

*"We don't have the numbers and support, at least not in any way organized like they do in the Cities," Solberg said. "None of the whistles, none of the honking or shouting. It's intimidating, because if you don't have a big group, we've all seen the videos of the attitude of some of these ICE agents, specifically that video where the agent tells the protester, 'You raise your voice, I'll erase your voice.' It's very clear that there's an attitude that if you resist us in any way, we will come after you, whether we legally can or not."*

*St. Croix residents have joined group chats on encryption apps such as Signal and taken observer training offered by Twin Cities-based immigrant advocacy groups in Hudson and River Falls. But often, immigrants are arrested and swept away by federal agents before help can arrive, meaning that the support networks are largely left to help families handle the effects afterwards.*

*Neighbors are bringing groceries to families staying home out of fear of arrest and providing rides to undocumented immigrants, who are legally barred from obtaining Wisconsin driver's licenses. Residents say they are providing this type of help to immigrants whether they have legal status to be in this country or not, because of ICE's history of arresting people based on their appearance.*

*The presence of ICE in the community is straining the relationship between residents and local law enforcement. Several residents have complained that the Baldwin Police Department is at the scene when ICE conducts operations in the community. The St. Croix County Sheriff's Department is not a participant in ICE's 287(g) program granting deputies some civil immigration authority and the department policy states that victims and witnesses of crimes will not be turned in to federal authorities. But the policy states that the department can notify ICE about undocumented immigrants who are held in the county jail for other crimes.*

*Solberg, who said she comes from a law enforcement family, said the perceived assistance local cops are giving ICE is harming their relationship with the community.*

*"I have personally seen, with my own eyes, I have seen Baldwin P.D. conferencing, standing with ICE immediately prior to ICE raiding an apartment complex," she said. "I want to give police every benefit of the doubt, because I've lived in places that have bad police, and Baldwin police is very community oriented, but also I'm not going to be willfully blind when so many people are saying that they have personally seen Baldwin P.D. working with ICE, assisting in detention, assisting in*

*action, actively assisting in actions.”*

*“The worst is it’s the perception, the perception in the community, for sure, across the board, among the ICE supporters and the ICE detractors, the perception in the community is that all the P.D. is working with ICE,” she continued. “Which, for people who are scared, who are legal migrants or possibly illegal immigrants, the police are supposed to be there to protect the community, and those entire groups of people do not feel safe with the law enforcement.”*

*But Baldwin Police Chief Kevin Moore denied that his officers were cooperating with federal agents.*

*“I am concerned that members of the immigrant community may feel hesitant to report crimes or contact law enforcement due to perceptions about immigration enforcement,” he said in an email. “That concern is taken seriously. The Baldwin Police Department is committed to serving everyone in our community, and we want residents to know that contacting our department for help does not place them at risk of immigration enforcement. As a small, community-focused department, our officers live and work in and around Baldwin and care deeply about the trust of the people we serve. While we occasionally encounter federal agents in the course of routine patrol or unrelated law enforcement activity, as we do with many agencies, these encounters are unplanned and do not reflect coordinated operations or cooperation related to immigration enforcement. Our intent is to maintain open communication with community members, address concerns directly, and ensure that Baldwin remains a safe place for everyone who lives, works, or visits here.”*

*ICE did not respond to a request for comment.*