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Man Arrested, Charged in Florida Abortion Clinic Fire

By | [Associated Press](#)



Jan. 2: The American Family Planning Clinic remains closed after being damaged by fire over early Sunday in Pensacola, Fla. (AP)

PENSACOLA, Fla. – Authorities say the man charged with setting fire to a Florida Panhandle abortion clinic long targeted by violence told investigators he was motivated by his hatred for abortion.

In an affidavit released late Thursday, prosecutors said 41-year-old Bobby Joe Rogers told investigators that he made a fire bomb and threw it at the Pensacola clinic early Sunday.

Rogers said he was pushed to action after he saw a young woman enter the clinic for an abortion while he was standing outside the clinic with a group of protesters recently.

Bobby Joe Rogers, 41, was charged with one count of damaging a building by fire or explosive and was being held Thursday at the Escambia County Jail, authorities said earlier in the day. He could face up to 20 years in prison if convicted.

Little was known about Rogers including any motive he may have had for torching the office of American Family Planning.

Court documents painted a picture of Rogers as a drifter with a criminal past.

Investigators initially said Rogers was from Tuscaloosa, Ala., and later said he was from Pensacola. They offered no reason for the discrepancy. Jail records listed no address.

Investigators said tips from the Pensacola community led to Rogers' arrest in the early New Year's day blaze.

The two-story Pensacola clinic that was gutted by flames has been attacked before. It was bombed on Christmas Day in 1984, and in 1994 a doctor and a volunteer who escorted patients to and from the clinic were shot to death as they arrived. The gunman, Paul Hill, was executed in 2003.

No one was hurt in Sunday's fire, which was reported around 1 a.m. that morning.

Investigators from a federal joint terrorism task force and the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives joined the investigation headed by the state fire marshal.

Rogers had a brief preliminary hearing on Thursday. He waived his right to detention hearing and to a preliminary hearing and agreed to be represented by the federal public defender's office.

An affidavit detailing the circumstances of Rogers arrest was initially sealed by the court clerk, but prosecutors had requested that it be unsealed.

Records from Alachua County show Rogers was arrested on Dec. 12, 2009, on charges of vehicle theft. Art Forgey, spokesman for the Alachua County Sheriff's office said he spent three months in the Alachua County Jail. Court records from the Alachua County case were not immediately available.

Rogers offered only "some kind of prison release ID card," when he and another man were pulled over driving the stolen car in 2009, the arresting officer wrote in his report.

The officer stopped the 1994 Mercury Sable because of a malfunctioning headlight. Rogers was the passenger.

"When I approached the vehicle the driver and the passenger appeared nervous. I could see open containers of beer in the car driver side and passenger side," the highway patrol officer wrote.

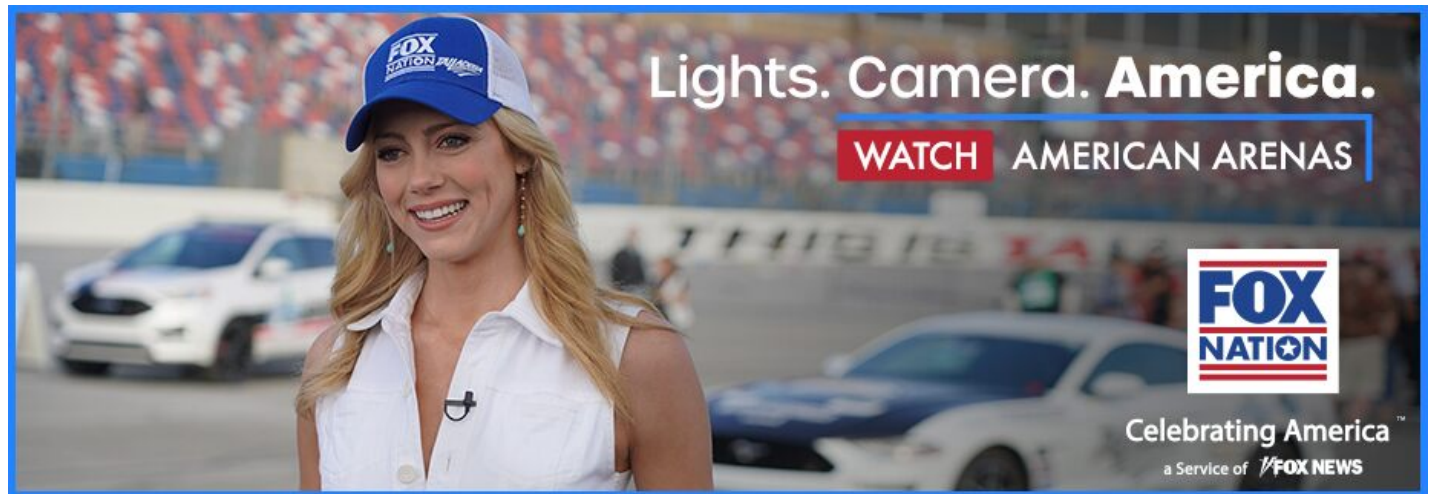
The driver had a suspended license and Rogers, who gave an address in Boca Raton, had no license. Both men were arrested on charges of grand theft auto. The arrest report indicated that Rogers had been drinking and that the officer was uncertain if Rogers had taken any drugs.

The 2009 arrest report spells Rogers last name "Rodgers," but his photo and his birthdate match.

Investigators said Sunday's blaze began behind the clinic in a wooded area and that the building burned without notice for a while because of the dense fog that had settled over the region that morning.

American Family Planning has been the site of near-daily protests with anti-abortion activists carrying Bibles, crosses and signs, but the violence that marked the clinic in the mid-1990s had stopped before the New Year's blaze.

Pensacola was the site of other abortion-related violence in 1993 when Dr. David Gunn was shot and killed at another clinic by an abortion protester.



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