

[MUSIC PLAYING]

NINA MOINI: Our top story on *Minnesota Now*, an attack on Congresswoman Ilhan Omar. A man lunged at her and sprayed a substance while she was speaking at a town hall in North Minneapolis last night. MPR news reporter, Peter Cox, joins me in the studio with what we so far. Thanks for being here, Peter.

PETER COX: Hi, Nina.

NINA MOINI: What was this event? And tell us about how this unfolded.

PETER COX: So Omar held a town hall event in North Minneapolis with state, county, and city leaders. The meeting was billed as an update on the work being done to hold ICE accountable for actions, including deadly encounters in Minnesota.

In a video of the incident captured by Reuters, a man who has been seated close to the front of the room for more than an hour is heard interrupting Omar not long into her remarks.

ILHAN OMAR: And DHS Secretary Kristi Noem must resign or face impeachment.

[APPLAUSE]

[INAUDIBLE YELLING]

AUDIENCE: Whoa, whoa, whoa!

PETER COX: As the man approaches the podium and Omar sees he's got a substance to spray at her, she doesn't cower. In fact, Omar charges after him with her fist raised, but the man is tackled to the ground by security.

Omar seems ready to speak at the podium again, but her staff urges her to make sure the substance is not dangerous before she does. But soon, she steps back to the microphone and continues the town hall after the man is ushered out of the room.

ILHAN OMAR: Here is the reality that people like this ugly man don't understand. We are Minnesota strong, and we will stay resilient in the face of whatever they might throw at us.

[CHEERING]

NINA MOINI: And Peter, this is just coming into the newsroom right now from Hennepin County Attorney Mary Moriarty, who was speaking about this incident, and says that they believe the preliminary reports that what was sprayed on Congresswoman Omar was not toxic.

So while they're not saying exactly what it was yet, they're saying it's not toxic. What else do you about what it looked like? Describe for folks who may not have seen yet.

PETER COX: So those in the room said it was a colored liquid with a pungent smell. It appeared to be held in a syringe with a plastic tube. And Minneapolis Police sent a forensic team to examine the scene, and State Senator Bobby Joe Champion, who was also at the event and had some spray land on him, said it was light pink in color and had a bad odor.

NINA MOINI: Is President Donald Trump saying anything about the incident?

PETER COX: So while the Minnesota Republican Party and several Congressional Republicans have condemned the attack, ABC News reported that Donald Trump claimed the incident was staged by Omar. In a phone conversation with an ABC correspondent last night, Trump said he had not seen the video of the incident.

He also repeated criticism of the Congresswoman. Without offering evidence, Trump told ABC, quote, "I don't think about her. I think she's a fraud. She probably had herself sprayed, knowing her." Minnesota DFL Chair Richard Carlbom, criticized Trump for his reaction.

RICHARD CARLBOM: We need the President of the United States to just clearly denounce acts of political violence. It's like the bare minimum we can ask of a leader in his position, and he fails to do so.

PETER COX: Now, I want to point out that Trump had slammed Omar as part of a speech in Iowa yesterday, just hours before the town hall, questioning her patriotism. Omar is a US citizen who was born in Somalia, which Trump has called a garbage country over and over.

NINA MOINI: What do we about this attacker and any potential charges, Peter?

PETER COX: So the 55-year-old man has been booked into Hennepin County Jail while he's awaiting charges, which as of an hour ago, had not been filed yet. MPR News does not generally name suspects until they're charged in court.

Now, the Associated Press says he was convicted in 1989 of auto theft, and he also has two DWIs on his record in Minnesota. Earlier this morning, Hennepin County Attorney Mary Moriarty said her office does not have a case submitted to it yet, but that could change at any moment. Meanwhile, Omar is going on with public events.

NINA MOINI: Thanks so much, Peter.

PETER COX: You're welcome.

NINA MOINI: That's MPR news reporter, Peter Cox.