



Vandalism found outside NRA office



By: Kristen Eskow - August 31, 2016

ROANOKE, Va. - Police are investigating vandalism discovered outside a National Rifle Association office in Roanoke.

"They were having an open house last Saturday," said Mel Williams, who owns the Old Southwest building where the office is located. "Several people here - being 15 to 20 people with the NRA were here - and they saw this event occurring while they were here."

Williams, an attorney who runs his law practice inside the building, said witnesses told him they saw two women tearing up NRA signs on the

front lawn and defacing a retaining wall and sidewalk, writing "murder lobby" in paint or chalk.

A photo of the vandalism later popped up on the Facebook page of The Betsy Riot, an anti-gun group that got started about a month ago, according to group leaders. Over Facebook messaging, the group said us those who defaced the wall are identified as "Betsys."

"The Betsy Riot relishes watching the wringing of hands and gnashing of teeth over impolite words in sidewalk chalk while tens of thousands of our fellow citizens are unnecessarily killed every year," a member of the group wrote to WFXR News in a Facebook message.

But Williams said he believes that's no excuse for vandalizing his property.

"Regardless of what their position is, what their agenda is, to go onto somebody's property and deface it in the way that they did is just unacceptable," he said.

Faded chalk or paint still remains on the retaining wall. NRA staffers spent hours scrubbing away the vandalism, Williams said.

Williams began leasing the space to the NRA in August and said the group will use it until the November elections. Now, Williams is doing what he can to prevent something like this from happening again.

"We're in the process of putting up surveillance cameras, just to protect the property and record anything that might happen," Williams said. "And then we've just asked the tenants and the staff here in the office just [to] be vigilant."

WFXR News tried speaking with the staffers from the NRA who work in the building, but they declined to provide an interview. We have also reached out to the NRA's national office and are still waiting to hear back. According to police, no charges have been filed, but the investigation is ongoing.