

Anti-mask zealot arrested after threat to kidnap and kill Democratic mayor of Wichita

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A Kansas man, Meredith Dowty, 59, was arrested on Oct. 16 after allegedly sending text messages to a Wichita city official in which he sought the home address of Democratic Mayor Brandon Whipple in order to kidnap and kill him.

The text messages have yet to be made public, but Whipple has stated that police showed him images of the texts which were sent to another city official and then forwarded to police. The messages allegedly authored by Dowty make explicit threats against the mayor's life for his continued imposition of a mask mandate, which has been in effect since July 3, 2020.

As part of the mandate, a \$25 fine was imposed for first violations of the citywide ordinance, which is in effect until at least Oct. 21. Right-wing opponents of the mandate came to a Sept. 8 city council meeting to voice their disdain at the ordinance for over seven hours, most citing religious or perceived "constitutional" violations arising from the mandate.

In comments to the *Wichita Eagle*, Whipple said that Dowty was "going to kidnap me and slash my throat and he needed my address because I needed to see the hangman—me and everyone who, something about tyranny." Whipple said the messages expressed Dowty's opposition to "masks and tyranny." In an interview with the *New York Times*, Whipple said the messages also described hanging him and then turning him into fertilizer.

"It sounded like the person was very upset about pretty much mask mandates and he said something about not being able to see his mother because of COVID restrictions on elderly homes," Whipple told the local newspaper. In follow-up comments on Sunday, Whipple reassured business interests that his mask mandate was not solely for medical purposes but to "ensure our economy can reopen."

Following the example of the national Democratic Party silence over plans to assassinate Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer and Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, the Kansas Democratic Party is remaining conspicuously silent on the latest assassination threat against an elected official. On the party's official Facebook page, not a word was written regarding Dowty's violent threats, as the Democrats, from Joe Biden and Nancy Pelosi on down, downplay the threat of fascist attacks incited by President Donald Trump. Trump has repeatedly railed against safety measures required by the coronavirus pandemic, including the wearing of masks.

After news broke of Dowty's arrest, Whipple posted a comment on social media condemning violence while thanking "the brave men & women of the @WichitaPolice who protect not just us, but our entire community. Thank you for the fast response in this matter & for all you do."

Unlike the Wolverine Watchmen plot to kidnap Whitmer from her vacation home on or before the presidential election, it doesn't appear Dowty had been engaged in lengthy planning for an abduction of Whipple. Police arrested him the same day he sent the text messages to the city official. The Sedgwick County district attorney is expected to announce further details regarding the investigation later this week. Dowty is currently booked in the Sedgwick County jail on a single charge of criminal threat with a bond amount of \$50,000.

Wichita ranks 50th among US cities in terms of population, with nearly 390,000 residents. Sedgwick County, which includes the city, is seeing an increase in COVID-19 cases and positivity rates since the forced reopening of schools and overall lessening of social distancing enforcement. County health data shows a

near doubling in the 14-day rolling average of positive tests within less than a month, from 4.8 percent on September 20 to 8.9 percent on October 17. As of this writing, out of the 859 deaths in Kansas due to COVID-19, 121 were in Sedgwick County.

Public voter registration records show that Dowty is a registered Republican. He is also a retired firefighter and, according to local musician and former journalist Joe Stumpe, is also a well-known local musician who plays under the name Cathead. Dowty's Cathead Facebook profile, which hasn't been updated since 2019, shows him playing guitar and harmonica at local bars and nightclubs.

The *Eagle* reports that Dowty was honored by the Wichita City Council in 2008 for rendering aid to a cop who was shot in both legs. The *Eagle* noted that as a firefighter Dowty was also one of the first responders to the DeBruce grain elevator explosion that occurred on June 8, 1998.

Wichita is a longtime center of far-right political activity, particularly of anti-abortion zealots who have targeted doctors who provide this vital health care service to women. In 1991, anti-abortion groups staged a series of violent protests, unsuccessfully trying to shut down the clinic operated by Dr. George Tiller. In 2009 an anti-abortion extremist murdered Dr. Tiller as he was acting as an usher during a church service.



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