

Activist with ties to Ohio Republican legislators plotted to kidnap and kill Governor Mike DeWine

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Local newspapers in Ohio have exposed a plot led by Republican activist Renea Turner to build a “posse” to kidnap and murder the state’s governor, Mike DeWine. Though DeWine is a Republican and a Trump supporter, he was evidently targeted for implementing mild restrictions to deal with the coronavirus pandemic, which has killed over 5,100 Ohioans.

Turner confirmed in a Friday interview with Cleveland.com that she was trying to recruit people to place the governor under “house arrest.” The plan was revealed when an individual she attempted to recruit filed a police report last week. State police then visited Turner but did not make an arrest. As of this writing, not a single national news publication had reported the Ohio developments.

Though it is not known how far advanced this particular plot was or how many people were involved, it comes just over two weeks after federal officials arrested over a dozen fascists who planned to kidnap and kill Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer and also discussed targeting Virginia Governor Ralph Northam. Trump has made no secret of his plans to mobilize far-right supporters to invalidate the popular vote and attempt to remain in office. This strategy is focused particularly on battleground states like Ohio and Michigan.

Turner is a Trump supporter who has connections to a group of Republican state legislators who have been calling for DeWine to be arrested for the damage to business interests caused by statewide lockdown measures.

State Representative John Becker, one of this group, told the *Dayton Daily News* on Friday that he personally met with Turner two weeks ago. In a short video responding to the revelations, Becker said Turner was building a “posse” whose plan was to “arrest the governor at his home, put him on trial for tyranny and with the potential for that being either execution or exile.”

Six weeks ago, Becker petitioned a prosecutor to file criminal charges against DeWine for “terrorism,” “inducing

panic” and other crimes related to the lockdown. In the same YouTube video announcing his awareness of the plot against DeWine, Becker provocatively repeated calls for viewers to submit affidavits in support of his effort to arrest DeWine. Earlier this autumn, Becker cynically declared: “When Gov. DeWine is arrested, I sincerely hope that he is wearing a mask and doesn’t get tasered.”

In a press conference held Friday to address other matters, DeWine responded to a question about the plot by saying he had not been previously briefed by police or federal officials.

He indicated that he took the plot seriously: “Look, we have people in every state who believe that they can take the law into their own hands. We have people who believe the government’s illegitimate and they have every right to go and basically overthrow the government in one form or the other. I think it’s incumbent upon all of us to denounce that and say that’s wrong.”

On Thursday, the day before details of the plot emerged, Turner traveled to the state Capitol and held a “swearing-in” ceremony for herself, claiming she was the legitimate governor, and presented a notarized “oath of office” signed by several supporters. In a Facebook post about the swearing-in, Turner said, “Governor Mike DeWine has become concentrated, grown and has become a Tyrant and will be held accountable immediately. He will receive a Tyrant’s punishment.”

Turner acknowledged on Friday that state police visited her after reports of the plot surfaced and treated her in a friendly manner, telling Cleveland.com that one policeman “said he was just there to check out my temperament and what my plans are.”

Another state legislator seeking to oust or arrest DeWine, State Representative Nino Vitale, claims the coronavirus was created by Bill Gates. Vitale led efforts earlier this year to force the resignation of Dr. Amy Acton, the director of the Ohio Department of Health and leader of the state’s

coronavirus response, who stepped down in June due to death threats.

The *Columbus Dispatch* reported that in May, “protesters, some armed, showed up at her Bexley home several times. ... Acton was given security detail, an unusual step.” At the time, an ABC affiliate in Cleveland wrote, “Neighbors reported several men walking up and down the street with assault weapons stating that there will be no violence ‘for now.’”

Representative Vitale referred to Acton, who is Jewish, as a “globalist” and a “medical dictator.” Thirty-two Republican state legislators, including Vitale and Becker, signed a declaration demanding DeWine reopen the state immediately.

Earlier this year, Vitale and other state legislators said DeWine was attempting to set up “concentration camps” in the state. If “your child tests positive for COVID they will remove your child from your home,” Vitale said on Facebook. His claims were also picked up by the Breitbart-linked *Ohio Star*, which published an article titled “Ohio FEMA Camps—Still More Questions than Answers” on September 4.

A report in the *Ohio Capital Journal* raises questions about Vitale’s possible ties to Turner herself, but makes clear that she was at the very least motivated by his incendiary statements: “Turner shared one post by Vitale from May 18, in which he accused DeWine of ‘giving himself total dictatorial power.’ Vitale also falsely suggested the governor knew about the virus in March 2019, many months before the novel coronavirus was ever discovered.”

It is not known if Turner has met with more legislators beyond Becker, including Vitale or the other Republican legislators sponsoring the impeachment effort: Paul Zeltwanger and Candice Keller.

There are also questions as to Turner’s possible ties to the Trump campaign.

When Turner ran for governor in 2018 as a Republican write-in candidate, her running mate for Lt. Governor was Keith Colton, who earlier in 2018 had been a candidate in the Republican primary for Congress in the state’s ninth congressional district. Colton won roughly a quarter of the primary vote, or 6,263 votes, indicating substantial institutional support.

Colton claims to have been a fairly prominent member of Trump’s 2016 campaign, claiming to have worked in West Virginia, Michigan, Indiana, Pennsylvania, New Hampshire, Iowa, South Carolina, and Ohio.

It appears this claim has some validity, since Colton’s campaign website featured a photo of him with Donald Trump from 2016. An AP photograph from 2017 also shows

Colton attending the presidential inauguration ball in Washington D.C.

Video of a 2018 campaign event shows Colton saying he “had the Trump staff living with me for 3 months [in Ohio] before the election. ... I was pretty much involved in all the Trump events on the north coast, from Toledo, Cleveland, Akron. I did a lot of VIP seating,” he claimed, adding that he “got a secret security clearance” and “picked up the vice president” on one occasion, as well as driving around a Trump campaign spokeswoman, Katrina Pierson.

Ohio is also a hotbed of militia activity. The Michigan plotters met in Dublin, Ohio in June, and FBI agent Richard Trask indicated that representatives of militia groups from “several states” were present.

After the arrests of 14 Michigan plotters earlier this month, the Columbus ABC affiliate reported: “In Ohio, a dozen militia groups have either started or have been active on the website MyMilitia.com since March when Governor Mike DeWine ordered people to stay in their homes due to the coronavirus.”

As in Michigan, the anti-lockdown rallies earlier this year provided the basis for far-right groups to meet and plan. Many well-funded right-wing groups were involved in planning the anti-lockdown rallies that took place at the Ohio state capital in April.

The event was sponsored by FreedomWorks, a subsidiary of a group funded by the billionaire Republican Koch brothers. The Ohio Liberty Coalition’s president is John McAvoy, who the Center for Media Democracy explains is “on the board of the Northwest Ohio Conservative Coalition.”

While many questions remain about Renea Turner’s connections and about how far advanced this particular plot was, what is clear is that the Trump administration has created a climate so toxic and violent that plots like this one became inevitable. This is not an accident, it is a critical element of his political strategy. The Democratic Party has remained completely silent on these dangerous developments in Ohio.



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