

Man sentenced to six years in prison for role in Michigan governor kidnap plot

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A federal judge sentenced a Harlan, Michigan man to over six years in prison on Wednesday for taking part in an extremist right-wing group's plot to kidnap Democratic Governor Gretchen Whitmer during state-mandated COVID-19 shutdowns last year. Ty Gerard Garbin, 25, is the first of those accused in the conspiracy to be sentenced.

Last fall, state and federal officials released details from a sweeping investigation into the plot against Whitmer. The men made plans to take the governor hostage and put her on trial for treason in Wisconsin, before potentially executing her.

Garbin is the only person to have pleaded guilty out of the more than a dozen men facing state and federal charges related to the plot. He pleaded guilty to a conspiracy to kidnap charge and admitted to staking out Whitmer's vacation home and training for the planned kidnapping and assassination.

During the sentencing hearing, Garbin apologized to Whitmer and her family.

"First, I would like to take this opportunity to apologize to Governor Gretchen Whitmer and her family," he told the court. "I've had a lot of time to reflect on my actions, and I never realized what my actions would have caused to her, but also her family."

"I can't even begin to imagine the amount of stress and fear her family members felt because of my actions, and for that I'm truly sorry," he said.

Four other Michigan residents—Adam Fox (Potterville), Daniel Joseph Harris (Lake Orion), Kaleb Franks (Waterford Township) and Brandon Caserta (Canton Township)—and Delaware resident Barry Croft have also been charged in federal court in connection with the kidnapping plot and will go to trial in October. They have pled not guilty, sticking to their unsubstantiated claim they were victims of entrapment by federal agents.

Another seven men, belonging to a group calling itself

the Wolverine Watchmen, were linked to the plot and have been arrested on state charges, rather than federal.

Prosecutors said the men rehearsed the kidnapping plot in what they called "field training exercises," which included weapons training and practicing how to breach a building. The men conducted daytime and nighttime surveillance of Whitmer's summer house and discussed planting explosives under a bridge to slow any responding police officers, court documents stated.

Prosecutors said Garbin cooperated extensively with the investigation and provided "a wide-ranging insider's view of the conspiracy," which they said evolved from an initial plan to storm the State Capitol with a group of about 200 militia men, take hostages and "execute tyrants." Garbin's attorneys and federal prosecutors asked US District Judge Robert Jonker to take his cooperation into account in his sentencing.

Federal sentencing guidelines for kidnapping conspiracy call for a sentence of up to 17.5 years, but prosecutors suggested Garbin serve nine. His attorneys called for a sentence "well below the guidelines."

Jonker acknowledged Garbin's cooperation with law enforcement and claimed he had a genuine interest in self-reform. In explaining why he was issuing Garbin a 75-month sentence, much shorter than federal guidelines called for, Jonker cited Garbin's "concrete" actions that showed he was taking responsibility for his actions.

In a victim impact statement, Whitmer wrote she would never be the same.

"I have looked out my windows and seen large groups of heavily armed people within 30 yards of my home. I have seen myself hung in effigy. Days ago at a demonstration there was a sign that called for 'burning the witch,'" she said.

"I am not the only one who has been impacted by this kidnapping plot. It is like throwing a pebble into a pond. The ripples expand to include my family and loved ones,

the state I love, the citizens I serve, the country I have always believed in and the idea of democracy itself. We have all been impacted by this,” Whitmer said.

While there is no doubt that Whitmer was deeply affected by the threats of violence, the same cannot be said of the national Democratic leadership, who chose not to make an issue of the conspiracy to kidnap and murder a prominent official of their own party.

In particular, the party’s presidential candidate Joe Biden, who had publicly considered Whitmer as one of his top potential choices for the vice presidency, never raised the subject in his debates with Trump, and barely discussed it during the last month of the fall campaign, when there were almost daily exposures of the details of the plot.

Nor did the Democratic National Committee or Democratic candidates for Congress undertake any defense of Whitmer, or seek to tie their Republican opponents to the conspiracy to kill her. This was under conditions that reports were emerging of definite connections between the Michigan fascists and sections of the Republican Party around Trump.

Whitmer was publicly denounced by Donald Trump when she enacted very limited coronavirus restrictions in the spring of 2020. Trump called on his supporters to “liberate” Michigan, and the State Capitol in Lansing was filled by gun-toting protesters calling for the governor’s removal. Many of the men charged in the plot attended the event.

Both the armed demonstration in Lansing and the subsequent kidnap plot served as dress rehearsals for the January 6, 2021 coup attempt in Washington, when thousands of Trump supporters stormed the US Capitol and detachments of Proud Boys and other fascist groups sought to hunt down prominent Democratic members of Congress (and some Republicans), in the hopes of taking prisoners who could serve as bargaining chips to keep Trump in office beyond the scheduled January 20 inauguration of Biden.



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