

Second Whitmer kidnap plotter to plead guilty in federal court

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Kaleb James Franks has agreed to plead guilty in federal court to the charges against him in connection with the plot to kidnap and kill Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer in 2020.

The plea deal with Franks that was released by prosecutors on Monday is the second agreement out of the thirteen plotters who were arrested on October 8, 2020, for planning to use violence to overthrow the state government in Michigan. Another plotter, Ty Garbin, pleaded guilty on January 27, 2021, and was sentenced to six years in prison on August 25, 2021.

Franks, 27, is one of six defendants who were charged in US District Court for the Western District of Michigan in Grand Rapids with kidnapping conspiracy, a federal crime that carries a maximum sentence of life in prison and a fine of \$250,000. The other seven defendants, along with a fourteenth conspirator from Wisconsin who was arrested on October 15, were charged with state crimes, including providing material support for terrorist acts, firearm crimes and gang membership.

The plea deal, which includes a statement from Franks that he “was not entrapped or induced to commit any crimes” by government informants involved in the case, is expected to be used against the remaining four defendants. Their trial is scheduled to begin on March 8 and the defense intends to argue that the men were entrapped by police agents.

Franks was employed as a peer recovery coach at an addiction treatment center. He previously battled addiction to heroin but has been sober since 2013, according to his lawyer. He was convicted in 2011 for cocaine possession and in 2013 for second-degree home invasion. He served nine months in jail and two years under the jurisdiction of drug courts. According to his LinkedIn profile, he studied clinical psychology

at Washtenaw Community College in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

A motion by Franks’ legal team to suppress his criminal record from the trial was rejected on February 1 by Chief US District Judge Robert J. Jonker, who permitted the prosecution to use this information to show predisposition of the defendant to kidnapping. Shortly after the judge’s decision, Franks began negotiating for a plea deal.

The 19-page plea agreement states that Franks agrees to the factual description by prosecutors of the crime that he committed, including, “From at least on or about June 6, 2020, through and including October 7, 2020, ... the defendant willfully and knowingly conspired with Adam Dean Fox (‘Fox’), Barry Gordon Croft, Jr. (‘Croft’), Daniel Joseph Harris (‘Harris’), Brandon Michael-Ray Caserta (‘Caserta’) and Ty Gerard Garbin (‘Garbin’) to kidnap the Governor of the State of Michigan (‘the Governor’).”

The document, which was signed by Franks and his attorney Scott Graham on February 6, goes on to detail activities of the defendant with the paramilitary Wolverine Watchmen, including participation in a protest in Lake Orion in spring 2020 where he met Harris. From there Franks participated in “tactical training” on June 28 where he met Fox, the leader of the militia group.

At a meeting on July 7, 2020, the plea agreement states, Franks “met Caserta, Harris, Garbin, and other Wolverine Watchmen in Milford, Michigan,” where the group discussed plans to “black bag politicians,” in other words, kill them and place them in body bags. On July 10, the group drove to Cambria, Wisconsin, a small town 46 miles northeast of Madison, to participate in “field training exercises” for the next two days.

Numerous illegal “short barreled” firearms were brought by the group to this training event and plans were discussed for “modifying legal projectiles to launch explosive devices,” and improvised explosive devices (IEDs) were constructed “using gunpowder and BBs as shrapnel.”

Making clear that the conspiracy extended beyond those arrested in Michigan, on July 18, 2020, “the defendant, Fox, Croft, Harris and others attended a meeting of regional ‘militia’ members in Peebles, Ohio.” Here the militia members discussed “planting explosive devices at Michigan State Police posts,” and Fox suggested that “they could storm the Capitol with 200 men, using machine guns and snipers.”

When Franks and Garbin said the assault plan was not feasible, “Fox also proposed kidnapping the Governor of Michigan (‘the Governor’) from other locations as an alternative.” At a meeting on July 23, members of the Wolverine Watchmen met at Harris’ residence in Lake Orion and expressed their support for the kidnapping plan and told anyone who was not “down” for participating that they should leave the meeting. Franks “knowingly and voluntarily joined the plan.”

On August 29, Fox conducted daytime surveillance of the Michigan governor’s vacation home in Antrim County and posted photos on the group’s encrypted group chat. On September 12–13, “Fox, Croft, Harris, Caserta, and Garbin attended a ‘field training exercise’ at Garbin’s property near Luther, Michigan,” that included the construction of a “shoot house” replica of the governor’s house that was used “to practice breaching a residence with firearms.”

The plan to kidnap the governor was specifically discussed in the afternoon on September 12 and later in the evening the area was cased for a bridge where explosives would be placed. Croft discussed using “the 37-millimeter projectile launcher on his assault rifle to take out the lead vehicle in the Governor’s protective detail” and “IEDs to ambush the Governor’s convoy.”

The group agreed to meet again in October to carry out further reconnaissance and field training exercises, but they were arrested first. The plea agreement identifies two individuals as undercover informants who participated in the plotting, “Confidential Human Sources (CHS) ‘Dan’ and ‘Steve.’”

The kidnapping plot against Governor Whitmer was a

precursor to the events of January 6, 2021, at the US Capitol when a mob led by far-right militias and fascists mobilized by Donald Trump and leading Republican politicians in Congress attempted to overturn the 2020 presidential election with violence.

While the full scale and scope of the conspiracy underway in Michigan and other states in the months leading up to the 2020 elections have yet to come to light—including the relationship of state and national Republican politicians, financial backers and law enforcement with the kidnap plotters—the details that have emerged so far fully support the position of the *World Socialist Web Site* that Trump’s January 6 attempt to overthrow the US Constitution was planned well in advance and came very close to succeeding.



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