

Testimony from FBI informant continues in second week of Whitmer kidnapping plot trial

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Dan Chappel, an FBI informant known as “Big Dan,” testified for a third day on Tuesday in US District Court in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in the trial of four men accused of plotting to take Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer hostage and execute her in the spring and fall of 2020.

Chappel was cross-examined by defense attorneys on Monday and Tuesday and asked about his work inside the Wolverine Watchmen, a militia group that the defendants used to plan and train for the kidnapping, and about communications with government handlers during his FBI surveillance work.

A 35-year-old truck driver for the US Postal Service and army veteran, Chappel said he became a member of the Wolverine Watchmen in March 2020 because he supported the organization’s stance on the Second Amendment. When other members began discussing acts of violence against law enforcement, Chappel said he reached out to a friend who was a police officer to express his concerns. He was shortly thereafter contacted by the FBI and agreed to stay inside the Wolverine Watchmen and monitor member activities.

The four men on trial are Adam Fox, 38, Daniel Harris, 24, and Brandon Caserta, 33, from Michigan, and Barry Croft Jr., 46, from Delaware. The defendants were arrested on October 8, 2020, on felony conspiracy to kidnap charges along with several other weapons-related charges. They are facing life sentences if convicted. Two other Michigan defendants, Ty Garbin, 25, and Kaleb Franks, 27, were arrested at the same time, but have accepted plea deals and are expected to testify for the prosecution during the trial.

Attorney Julia Kelly, representing Daniel Harris, questioned Chappel on Monday afternoon and Tuesday morning. She pressed the defense strategy that the four defendants were entrapped by the government and had no intention of acting on their recorded statements threatening violence against the “tyrant” Whitmer to

achieve their goal of forcing the state government to lift the lockdown that had been imposed in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic.

Kelly has been focusing on the evaluation made by Chappel and his two FBI contacts that the group of men had no clear objectives and were wasting the informant’s time. Kelly asked Chappel if he recalled agreeing with his FBI handlers that “these guys don’t have a plan,” to which he replied, “yes.”

Earlier in the day on Monday, when asked by a prosecutor about a group chat that was being used by the Wolverine Watchmen, Chappel acknowledged that he received the messages from the group’s leader Fox, which rallied the members to act against the governor.

After the Michigan Supreme Court struck down a law that permitted Whitmer to use her executive authority to impose restrictions on businesses and implement a “stay at home” order, the jury was shown a chat message from Fox that read, “When’s the lynching,” and “She should be arrested now, immediately. Who wants to roll out?”

During the cross-examination on Monday, Chappel testified that he had bought beer for the group and that Fox and several others smoked marijuana while they were surveilling the governor’s summer home in Elk Rapids, Michigan. In one instance, Chappel said that during one training session that he led members on, the group fired high-powered rifles from a huge-caliber, belt fed machine gun mounted on a tripod.

Although his FBI contacts instructed him not to participate in the tactical planning for the kidnapping, Chappel testified that he did at times make suggestions that were aimed at deescalating the actions being discussed by the group. Among these were proposals to fire a shot through the window of the governor’s empty summer residence and mailing her the empty shell casing.

The exposure of a plot to assassinate Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer has uncovered the existence

of a nationwide underground far-right terror network.

The informant told defense attorney Kelly that he sent text messages to his FBI contacts and called them regularly, especially after meetings with militia members. In one text message shown to the jury, FBI Special Agent Henrik Impola praised the informant for “bringing people together.”

Chappel also testified that he was concerned about being identified as an FBI informant. His handlers told him to blame another militia member who others had already referred to as “fed boy” for being a government agent.

In his earlier testimony, Chappel said the group had purchased an infrared light and night vision goggles so that they could see one another. According to another FBI informant, Mark Schweers, their plot included shooting the governor’s security detail, seizing her from her home and transporting her to a boat waiting on Lake Michigan where they would take her out into the middle of the lake and desert her.

Chappel said that defendant Caserta was pushed to the “breaking point” when the COVID-19 vaccines were announced, and he talked about bombing vaccine plants and killing police officers, doctors and lawyers who supported a vaccine mandate. During a recorded conversation, Caserta said, “Buildings that manufacture vaccines—blow them up.”

Caserta also denounced pandemic contact tracing as “constitutional trampling,” and said during a meeting in August 2020, “We create a dynamic where no one wants to be a contact tracer because they might fucking die.” Caserta also said in the recordings captured by Chappel, “Doctors who advocated mandated vaccines—bullet to the face,” and, “Buildings that manufacture the vaccines, blow them up. I’m not even kidding. Any lawyer that supports a vaccine mandate, decapitate them in their own home.”



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