

Convicted co-conspirator says accused kidnapper Fox wanted to publicly hang the governor of Michigan

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Ty Garbin, who pleaded guilty in January 2021 of plotting to take the governor of Michigan hostage, testified in US District Court in Grand Rapids on Tuesday and Wednesday against two men who are being tried a second time on federal kidnap conspiracy and weapons charges. The first trial of Adam Fox and Barry Croft Jr. last April ended with a hung jury.

Garbin, who is serving a six-year prison sentence, is a 26-year-old former airline mechanic from Hartland Township, Michigan. He had been a leader of the Wolverine Watchmen since joining the militia group in February 2020. Garbin met Fox at a Second Amendment rally in Lansing, Michigan, on June 18, 2020.

On Tuesday afternoon, Garbin testified for the prosecution that Fox wanted to try Democratic Party Governor Gretchen Whitmer for treason due to the lockdown measures that had been imposed by the state of Michigan during the early months of the coronavirus pandemic.

During his testimony, prosecutors played dash camera videos of Garbin while he was in a vehicle that rolled past Whitmer's northern Michigan cottage during a nighttime surveillance mission of the vacation home on September 12, 2020.

In his testimony on Wednesday, Garbin said, "Adam Fox had mentioned storming the Capitol building and arresting elected officials and holding them on trial for their crimes and treason." He added, "[A] particular elected official would be Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. Hang her on public TV for the world to see."

Garbin also said the purpose of storming the state Capitol and executing Governor Whitmer was to foment as much chaos as possible across the country.

Garbin identified Croft as an anti-government activist whom he met later. He said Croft had talked about firebombing Michigan State Police patrol cars and simultaneous shootings of governors in Michigan and other states.

The co-conspirator said Fox and Croft were the ringleaders of the plot and were "very eager" to carry out their plan. He said Croft discussed plans to use an AR-15-style rifle modified with a rocket launcher to attack Governor Whitmer's security detail.

Garbin told the jury that no one convinced him or anyone else to join the plot against the Michigan governor. He was the host of a weekend training exercise by the kidnap plotters at his family property near Luther, Michigan, a town of 318 people approximately 90 miles north of Grand Rapids.

Garbin constructed the "shoot house" at the property which they used for practicing a raid on the governor's vacation cottage in Elk Rapids on Grand Traverse Bay. Both Fox and Croft were present for the training session. According to the prosecution, after weeks of training, the plot included plans to purchase \$4,000 worth of explosives to be detonated at a bridge near the cottage.

During cross-examination by defense attorneys, Garbin said he trained Fox to become a better shooter. "I wouldn't say he stole the show," Garbin said, referring to Fox's limited weapons skills. The defense line of questioning was aimed at showing that Garbin had been promised a reduced sentence if he testified.

As part of his plea agreement, Garbin was not charged with the weapons offenses even though he admitted to making untraceable ghost guns and having worked on explosives. However, the witness said he

was not promised anything by the prosecution and only wanted to “tell the truth.”

The second co-conspirator, Kaleb Franks, 27 and from the Detroit area, said on the stand that he did not like Fox. He said he was depressed in 2020 and had planned to be killed in a shootout with police during the kidnapping of the governor. The defense also asked Franks about his guilty plea and the witness said, “Nobody has asked me to lie. They’ve only asked me to tell the truth.”

Fox, 39, from Wyoming, Michigan, and Croft, 46, a trucker from Bear, Delaware, were arrested on October 8, 2020, along with Garbin, Franks and two others, Brandon Caserta and Daniel Harris, and charged with federal offenses. On the same day, eight others were also indicted and arrested on state charges.

The defense teams for Fox and Croft have called Caserta and Harris to testify for their clients in the current trial, but the two previously acquitted defendants have used their Fifth Amendment rights against self incrimination to decline.

Following the guilty pleas of Garbin and Franks, who also testified in the first trial, two of the four remaining federal defendants, Caserta and Harris, were acquitted and the jury was divided on the charges against Fox and Croft.

The testimony of FBI informants who had infiltrated the Wolverine Watchmen continued Monday and Tuesday, as “Big Dan” Chappel took the stand and gave details of the activities of the kidnap plotters. Chappel, a 35-year-old US Army veteran and postal service contractor, who had joined the militia group to improve his shooting, said Fox was a leader of the group at its meetings, training sessions and reconnaissance trips to the governor’s cottage.

Chappel said he approached a police officer friend when he learned about the kidnapping conspiracy and the threat to the lives of cops. From there the FBI contacted him and asked him to stay inside the organization as an undercover informant and help their investigation.

The defense focused on the \$54,000 in payments made to Chappel by the FBI as compensation for his expenses and time. The defense attorney said the FBI bought Chappel a smartwatch that allowed the informant to record during “OpSec,” or operational security situations where cellphones were not allowed

in the sessions. Chappel said this took place during a meeting in the Vac Shack, a Grand Rapids vacuum store where Fox lived in the basement.

Throughout the first and second trials, the defense has concentrated on the presence of numerous FBI agents inside the group of kidnap conspirators and claimed that the men who were charged with crimes were entrapped and would never have gone through with what they talked about. However, according to the timeline presented by the prosecution, the discussions about kidnapping Governor Whitmer began before the informants had infiltrated the group.

In a significant revelation during his testimony, Chappel told the jury that the Michigan state police allowed armed protesters into the state Capitol building in Lansing on April 30, 2020, at the specific request of the FBI, who said doing so would “de-escalate” the situation. The informant said he used his live wire to communicate to his FBI handlers that the members of the Wolverine Watchmen were discussing a violent assault on the Capitol. He added that his warning convinced the FBI to ask the state police to open the doors and let the armed men into the building.



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