

Two leaders of plot to kidnap and kill Michigan governor are sentenced in federal court

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The two men considered ringleaders of the conspiracy to kidnap and kill the governor of Michigan in 2020 were sentenced on Tuesday and Wednesday in federal court in Grand Rapids.

Adam Fox, 39, of Wyoming, Michigan, was given a 16-year sentence on Tuesday and Barry Croft, Jr., 47, of Bear, Delaware, was given a 19.5-year sentence on Wednesday by US District Judge Robert Jonker. These are the longest prison terms handed down so far against those involved in the kidnapping plot.

Croft was given more years in jail than Fox because Judge Jonker applied the terrorism enhancement provision to his sentence. The judge said, “I do think Mr. Croft is a more culpable and risky individual.” He added that Croft formulated the plan that gave Fox “something to grab onto.”

Judge Jonker said he did not apply the terrorism provision to Fox’s sentence because, “I see nothing in the record... nothing that makes me think he’s a natural leader and nothing that makes me think he’s the kind of person that anybody involved in this group was naturally going to follow.”

In both cases, Judge Jonker rejected the prosecution’s request for life sentences. On Tuesday, he said, “I don’t think life is needed to achieve the important public deterrent factors.” The judge said he referenced a 2018-2019 Northern California case in which US citizen Amer Alhaggagi was sentenced to more than 15 years after pleading guilty of trying to assist supporters of ISIS. Prosecutors in that case requested 33 years in prison.

Fox and Croft were arrested on October 8, 2020 along with 12 others—most of whom were members of the Wolverine Watchmen militia organization—after they

had carried out armed training exercises and reconnaissance of Governor Gretchen Whitmer’s vacation home, with the goal of forcing an end to lockdowns and other public health measures imposed by the Michigan government in the early months of the coronavirus pandemic.

The two men were charged—along with four others—under federal kidnap conspiracy statutes and federal laws against conspiring to use a weapon of mass destruction. Croft was also charged with possessing an unregistered destructive device. After defendants Ty Garbin and Kaleb Franks pled guilty to the charges, the first federal trial, held last April, ended with a jury acquittal of Daniel Harris and Brandon Caserta and a hung jury for Fox and Croft.

Fox and Croft were tried a second time, in August, and convicted on all charges by a Grand Rapids jury. Throughout the trial and the presentencing hearings, the lawyers for the two claimed that the men were no danger to anyone because they were “losers” who could never have followed through on what they talked about and posted on social media.

During comments after the sentencing, Croft’s attorney Josh Blanchard called the terrorism sentencing guidelines “ridiculous.” He had argued in court documents that Croft suffered from substance abuse problems, including a heroin addiction as a teenager, and had unresolved mental health issues. Blanchard also referred to recorded statements Croft made that were excluded from the trial, such as “walking across the ceiling and multiplying the power of zoltron by seven,” in an effort to portray him as unstable and in need of intervention.

In requesting a life sentence for Croft, prosecutors

wrote that he was a “stoned crazy pirate,” an extremist and bomb maker who was determined to incite a second Civil War, known in right-wing and fascist circles as a “boogaloo.” They said he was a national leader of the fascist Three Percenters militia group and a “spiritual leader” who was “putting himself in the role of a prophet for these people.”

The prosecutors wrote, “Croft was a leader or organizer of the criminal activity because he conceived the plan, recruited Fox, helped Fox recruit others.” They added, “The eventual plan was comprised of elements Croft laid out, including targeting a state governor, and using improvised explosives to hinder law enforcement.”

The prosecution argued, “Only a life sentence can adequately address Croft’s crimes and deter him and others from pursuing such apocalyptic visions for our country.” In calling for a life sentence for Fox on Tuesday, Assistant US Attorney Nils Kessler warned that he would still be dangerous when he someday walked free.

As evidence showed during their trial, the plan to kidnap Whitmer included preparations for an armed battle with her security team at her summer home near Elk Rapids, Michigan. Once seized, the Democratic Party governor was to be transported to Wisconsin to be “tried” and executed, or taken to the middle of Lake Michigan where she would be abandoned in a boat with no engine or means of returning to shore.

Throughout the legal proceedings involving the kidnapping plot, the far-right and fascist politics driving the scheme have received little attention in the courtroom or the corporate media. Meanwhile, the connections between figures such as Croft and groups such as the Three Percenters, the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers and leading figures within the Republican Party and the Trump White House in the weeks and months before and after the 2020 presidential election have been kept in the background.

The fact that members of the Wolverine Watchmen carrying automatic rifles were allowed to enter the Michigan Capitol building in Lansing during a right-wing protest against COVID-19 restrictions in April 2020 has received little attention in the press. The demonstrators openly threatened Whitmer.

The demonstration was backed by Michigan Republican Party officials and then-President Donald

Trump, who tweeted “Liberate Michigan.” Trump similarly hailed fascistic anti-lockdown protests at state capitols in Minnesota and Virginia.

The eight other men arrested in 2020 were charged with state offenses. Paul Bellar, Joseph Morrison and Pete Musico were sentenced in Jackson County on December 15 to a minimum of seven, 10 and 12 years in prison, respectively. Five others—Michael Null, William Null, Eric Molitor, Shawn Fix and Brian Higgins—are awaiting the start of their trial in Antrim County, Michigan on charges of providing material support for terrorist acts.

Attorneys for both Fox and Croft have indicated that they intend to appeal their clients’ convictions.



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