

Wisconsin man pleads guilty to state charges in plot to kidnap governor of Michigan

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Brian Higgins, one of five men charged with state offenses in the plot to kidnap and kill Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer in 2020, pleaded guilty on Wednesday in an Antrim County court.

Higgins, 54, from Wisconsin Dells, Wisconsin, admitted in court that he attempted to provide material support for terrorism, a crime that carries a maximum sentence of five years in prison.

According to a report by the Associated Press, Higgins appeared via video from Wisconsin Dells, where he has been free on bond. "I wish to plead guilty," the defendant told the court in Bellaire, a town of 1,000 people near Grand Traverse Bay in the northwest lower peninsula of Michigan.

Higgins said he rigged a camera to his pickup truck and went on a trip in the middle of the night to stake out the Elk Rapids vacation home of Governor Whitmer in September 2020. Whitmer was not at home at the time.

According to the AP, "Prosecutors also had evidence that Higgins trained with key members of the conspiracy at a 'kill house' on the same weekend as the ride to Elk Rapids."

A total of 14 men were arrested in an FBI sting operation in October 2020, when they attempted to buy materials for explosives that were to be used as part of the plot to seize the governor from her Elk Rapids residence.

The plot—which included plans to engage the governor's security detail in a gunfight and then kill the governor by abandoning her in a boat in the middle of Lake Michigan—was being prepared by the men as part of a fascist campaign to spark a civil war in the US prior to the 2020 presidential election.

Other possible scenarios for the kidnapping of Whitmer included storming the Michigan Capitol

building, seizing the governor and transporting her to Wisconsin where she would be put on trial and executed by hanging or beheading for acts of treason.

Nine kidnap plotters were previously tried on state and federal charges. Joe Morrison, Pete Musico and Paul Bellar were convicted on similar state charges in Jackson County in October and sentenced to between 7 and 12 years in prison.

In federal court in Grand Rapids, a jury found Adam Fox and Barry Croft Jr.—who were characterized by prosecutors as the ring leaders of the kidnapping scheme—guilty of conspiracy charges. Fox, 39, of Wyoming, Michigan, was sentenced to 16 years in prison; and Croft, 47, of Bear, Delaware, was sentenced to 19.5 years in prison in late December.

Two defendants in the federal trial, Ty Garbin and Kaleb Franks, pled guilty to the charges and received lesser sentences of between 2.5 and 4 years in prison. Two other federal defendants, Brandon Caserta and Daniel Harris, were acquitted by a jury in an earlier trial in Grand Rapids.

Most of the kidnap plotters were members of a militia group known as the Wolverine Watchmen that had been founded in response to the "Stay Home, Stay Safe" order imposed by Whitmer in the early days of the coronavirus pandemic. The order directed all businesses to suspend operations, except for those considered to be providing essential services.

The members of the Wolverine Watchmen held meetings and training exercises to prepare the governor's kidnapping and espoused far-right and white supremacist views about inciting a "boogaloo," a term used by fascists to denote a race war in the US.

The Wolverine Watchmen were active in several protests at the Michigan Capitol in Lansing, one of which included members of the militia entering the

building with long arms and looking for the governor who was not there that day.

Although prosecutors have not confirmed it, the guilty plea by Higgins appears to have been offered in exchange for his cooperation in the prosecution of the other four state defendants: Michael and William Null, both 40, of Plainwell and Shelbyville, respectively; Shawn Fix, 40, of Belleville; and Eric Molitor, 38, of Cadillac.

These men all pled not guilty to one count of providing material support for an act of terrorism and one count of possession of a firearm during the commission of a felony. The state trial is scheduled to begin in August.

Higgins was arraigned on May 4, 2021 and released on \$100,000 bond. On Tuesday, media reports said Higgins had changed his plea. The defendant had originally sought to block his extradition to Michigan from Wisconsin on the grounds that the order was signed by Governor Whitmer and represented a conflict of interest.

Commenting on Higgins' guilty pleas, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel said, "Anti-government extremism poses a threat to the safety of public officials, law enforcement officers and residents all across our state. ... We will keep fighting to deliver justice as the remaining prosecutions continue to play out."

Consistently over the past two and half years, Democratic Party officials, including Whitmer herself, have refused to characterize the kidnapping plot as the work of fascists. They have also avoided drawing any connection between the activities of the 14 men and the attempted coup of January 6, 2021, that was organized by then-President Donald Trump and a cabal of conspirators in the Republican Party from the White House.

By focusing exclusively on the criminal prosecution of the plotters for kidnap conspiracy and excluding any discussion of the political motivations and connections of these individuals with the increasingly fascist Republican Party, the Democrats are themselves blocking the public from access to critical information about the far-reaching threat to democratic rights.

Even though Whitmer has called attention to the fact that the courts and media have concealed the fact that the plotters intended to murder her, she has refused to

point to the incitement of the Wolverine Watchmen by Donald Trump, who issued a call through social media for his fascist supporters to "Liberate Michigan."

While many of the Michigan defendants have been given substantial prison terms, the full details of their connections with a nationwide network of fascists, neo-Nazis, anti-Semites and white supremacists has yet to be uncovered.



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