

# *Three men convicted of supporting plot to kidnap Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer*

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Detroit, October 26 (RHC)-- Three men accused of supporting terrorism in the plot to kidnap Michigan's governor were convicted of all charges Wednesday in a trial that focused on paramilitary drills and fierce

contempt for government ahead of the 2020 election.

Joe Morrison, his father-in-law Pete Musico, and Paul Bellar were found guilty of supplying “material support” for a terrorist act as members of a group known as the Wolverine Watchmen.

They held gun training in rural Jackson County with a leader of the kidnapping scheme, Adam Fox, who was disgusted with Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer and other officials and said he wanted to snatch her. The trial in state court was an offshoot of the main case in federal court, which produced mixed results: conspiracy convictions for Fox and three others but also two acquittals.

Jurors in Jackson, Michigan, read and heard violent, anti-government screeds as well as support for the “Boogaloo,” a civil war that might be triggered by a shocking abduction. Prosecutors said COVID-19 restrictions ordered by Whitmer turned out to be fruit to recruit more people to the Watchmen.

“The facts drip out slowly,” state Assistant Attorney General Bill Rollstin told the jury, “and you begin to see — wow — there were things that happened that people knew about. ... When you see how close Adam Fox got to the governor, you can see how a very bad event was thwarted.”

Morrison, 28, Musico, 44, and Bellar, 24, were also convicted of a gun crime and membership in a gang. Prosecutors said the Wolverine Watchmen was a criminal enterprise.

Morrison, who recently tested positive for COVID-19, and Musico were emotional as they watched the verdicts by video away from the courtroom. Judge Thomas Wilson ordered all three to jail while they await sentencing on Dec. 15.

The verdicts “are further proof that violence and threats have no place in our politics,” said Whitmer, who has not participated as a trial witness or spectator in the state or federal cases. “Those who seek to sow discord by pursuing violent plots will be held accountable under the law.”

Attorney General Dana Nessel, a Democrat in a tight race for reelection, hailed the outcome and praised law enforcement. After hearing nine days of testimony, the jury deliberated Tuesday afternoon and for less than two hours Wednesday.

“Jackson County is not known to have, I guess I would say, liberal juries. They tend to be a conservative bunch,” Nessel said. “But I think what they saw here was that this is not a political matter. ... These are individuals that didn't align themselves with any party at all. In fact, they were just anti-government all together.”

Defense attorneys argued that Morrison, Musico and Bellar had broken ties with Fox by late summer 2020 when the Whitmer plot came into focus. Unlike Fox and others, they didn't travel to northern Michigan to scout the governor's vacation home or participate in a key weekend training session inside a makeshift “shoot house” in Luther, Michigan.

“In this country you are allowed to talk the talk, but you only get convicted if you walk the walk,” Musico's attorney, Kareem Johnson, said in his closing remarks.

Defense lawyers couldn't argue entrapment. But they attacked the tactics of Dan Chappel, an Army veteran and undercover informant. He took instructions from FBI agents, secretly recorded conversations and produced a deep cache of messages exchanged with the men.

Whitmer, who is seeking reelection on November 8th, was never physically harmed. Undercover agents and informants were inside Fox's group for months. The scheme was broken up with 14 arrests in October 2020.

Fox and Barry Croft Jr. were convicted of a kidnapping conspiracy in federal court in August. Daniel Harris and Brandon Caserta were acquitted last spring. Ty Garbin and Kaleb Franks pleaded guilty.

Five of the 14 men are facing charges in state court in Antrim County, the site of Whitmer's second home. A judge there still must determine whether there is sufficient evidence to send them to trial.

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