

8 jurors picked for supremacist's trial - Mental fitness of witness eyed

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Eight jurors, half of them minorities, were selected Thursday in the murder-solicitation trial of white supremacist Matthew Hale, whose church espouses racist beliefs.

Four more permanent jurors as well as four alternates remain to be selected.

Among those picked were a former Chicago police officer who teaches special education, a hotel housekeeper, an unemployed computer analyst, a Northwestern University assistant dean and a chief financial officer for a not-for-profit group.

In another development Thursday, two lawyers for Hale, Thomas Anthony Durkin and Patrick Blegen, sought to block the testimony of a key government witness on the grounds that he is mentally incompetent.

Their court filing raised questions about whether Jon Fox is still taking medication for manic depression and said he had acted strangely during an arrest for disorderly conduct in November in North Dakota.

A month earlier, Fox, a former minister in a church founded by Hale, now known as the Creativity Movement, told federal authorities that Hale had asked him to kill U.S. District Judge Joan Humphrey Lefkow of Chicago.

U.S. District Judge James Moody, brought in from Hammond, Ind., to hear the case, made no immediate decision on the request to bounce Fox from testifying at the trial.

Much of the government's case is based on undercover recordings by a second former Hale confidant, identified in court papers as Tony Evola, an FBI plant in Hale's group who rose to head his security detail.

In court papers, the defense has contended it was Evola who was trying to prod Hale to order Lefkow's murder.

Moody asked prospective jurors a range of personal questions and others intended to gauge any personal biases and whether they could be fair to Hale in spite of his white supremacist beliefs.

Moody asked prospective jurors what newspapers and magazines they read, their favorite TV shows and their religious affiliation, if any.

Several prospective jurors said they had particularly strong feelings about racial prejudice, but they indicated they could still be fair to Hale.

None said they would hold against Hale his use of ethnic slurs and vulgar racial language, apparently on the government's undercover tape-recordings.

One member of Jehovah's Witnesses who said he couldn't "in good conscience" pass judgment on another person was passed over.

Two people were excused Thursday after they read newspapers in the courtroom despite the judge's admonition earlier against reading, listening or viewing news reports during the trial.

Opening statements are scheduled for Monday.

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