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POLITICS

Why did a Lawler aide's name pop up in opposition's chat group, urging Town Hall disorder?



David McKay Wilson

Tax Watch and government accountability columnist

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A mobile phone number belonging to Rep. Mike Lawler's deputy district director was used to infiltrate an anti-Lawler's organization's private Signal chat group and urge disruptive behavior at a Town Hall.

Someone using Erin Crowley's mobile number gained entrance to the private group under the name "Jake Thomas," but refused numerous requests to prove their identity once leaders of the Fight Lawler organization suspected it was really Crowley.

Crowley, R-Mahopac, is a Putnam county legislator who also works for Lawler as his deputy district director.

At Lawler's May 4 Town Hall at Kennedy Catholic Prep in Somers, Crowley patrolled the aisles of the auditorium, scolding dissenters to pipe down. Meanwhile, the person claiming to be Jake Thomas live-posted with indignation about Lawler, R-Pearl River, from the auditorium.

"I can't stand how he lies!" Thomas posted at 6:38 p.m., according to the Signal transcript. "We should boo him off the stage!"

Crowley's name popped up next to the posts in the chat of one Fight Lawler leader who had previously had Crowley's name in her contacts.

After two Lawler critics were carried out of the hall by New York State troopers, Thomas posted that chat group members should leave the auditorium to protest Lawler's crack down on dissent and his evasive answers to questions from the audience.

"Should we walk out en masse?" posted Thomas. "Make a point we won't tolerate his bullsh** anymore."

Erin Crowley's name came up in private Signal chat

Crowley, 40, in her first term in the Putnam County Legislature, was named Lawler's deputy district director in 2023 and runs his district office at Carmel Town Hall. She's seeking election to a second term in the Putnam County Legislature in November.

Lawler, R-Pearl River, a frequent guest on national television news shows, was reelected to a second term in 2024 by almost 24,000 votes in a district with a Democratic enrollment advantage. He had said he would make a decision in June on running for governor in 2026, but had yet to declare his intentions as of July 7.

Fight Lawler co-founder Maureen Morrissey, 63, of Mount Kisco, a retired teacher who worked in the Port Chester and Pelham school districts, said the group's digital sleuthing turned up evidence that is yet to be refuted.

"She infiltrated our Signal group," Morrissey said. "We are so sickened by it."

Signal is an encrypted communications app used by groups to secure internal conversations. In the Signal mobile app, a user's mobile number is a principal identifier. While Signal users can adopt a handle — the person who sought entry to the Fight Lawler chat used @jakethomas.o8 — the actual name of a Signal user making a post will come up on other users' phones if their mobile number is already in the contacts.

Jen Colamonico, who chairs the Putnam County Democratic Committee, discovered Crowley's mobile phone number in the Fight Lawler organization's private Signal chat around midnight on the early morning of May 5, hours after the Town Hall.

A post that had appeared on Colamonico's Signal feed during the Town Hall at 6:38 p.m., under Erin Crowley's name, urged Lawler foes in the Kennedy auditorium to boo her boss. Colamonico had Crowley's mobile number in her contacts. Meanwhile, on the Signal feed of Fight Lawler co-founder Ann Starer, the same statement about booing Lawler had appeared under the name Jake Thomas.

Starer said she suspected that Crowley, or the person using her number, tried to rile up the crowd to discredit Lawler's opponents and get them to leave.

"Walking out of the hall would have been to their benefit," said Starer. "That would have been great for them. I said on the chat that I didn't think it was a good idea."

As of June 24, Crowley's mobile number was no longer connected to the Signal app.

Ciro Riccardi, Lawler's director of communications, did not respond to two emails and a phone message seeking comment over the past three weeks. Crowley has not responded to three email requests for comment since first contacted on the issue May 20. She walked away from this writer on June 16 when asked about the Signal group following a meeting of Putnam County legislative committee in Carmel. She did so again on July 1, as she was escorted by a Putnam County deputy sheriff to a legislative meeting.

Crowley and Riccardi were asked whether Lawler's office knew that Crowley's phone number was used to gain entry into Fight Lawler's Signal group or that Crowley's phone number was used to live post during the Town Hall. They were also asked whether Crowley herself used a fake identity to infiltrate the group chat, and whether she made those live posts during the Town Hall.

Whoever is behind Jake Thomas' Facebook account did not respond to a message sent there seeking comment.

Who is Jake Thomas?

Colamonico was so troubled by seeing Crowley's name pop up in the private Fight Lawler group, which discussed logistics for the May 4 event, that she texted Starer.

“Ann, just so you know, Erin Crowley works for Lawler here in Putnam,” said Colamonico, of Mahopac. “You might remove her.”

Of interest: [Nyack woman removed from Lawler Town Hall learned about free speech, activism from her dad](#)

Colamonico had the same mobile number for Crowley that I used in late March to communicate with Legislator Crowley, by voice and text, on the issue of farmland protection in Putnam County.

Starer said that an individual using the name Jake Thomas had joined the Fight Lawler group's Facebook page and sought an invitation to the Signal group on April 30. Thomas told organizers he and his wife wanted to attend Lawler's Town Hall meeting five days later in Somers.

Thomas referred the group to his Facebook page, which features a cheery couple in their 20s. The cover photo shows a man who is supposed to be Thomas in military fatigues, accompanied by a man brandishing a knife and another holding a rifle. Thomas has 26 Facebook friends. His profile lists no home address or profession.

The Facebook profile shows a bipartisan spirit. The account follows Democrats such as the Clarkstown Democratic Committee, the Putnam County Democratic Committee and the campaign committee of Rockland County Legislator Beth Davidson, who is seeking the Democratic nomination to face Lawler in 2026.

The account also follows Republican groups — Robert Kearns for Carmel Town Board and state Sen. George Borrello, R-Chautauqua. The account showed Carmel hometown cred by following the Italian American Club, Carmel Water District #2, and a memorial page for the late Ed Scott, a legendary volunteer in the Mahopac Fire Department.

The public posts on the page are all pictures. The oldest posting was an updated cover photo on Sept. 24, 2021, with the quote: "Bravery is the capacity to perform properly even when scared half to death." The most recent post, on March 7, pictures a man and woman, identified as Thomas and his wife, posing in front of flowering cherry trees.

Person suspected of being Crowley would not appear on video

After hearing from Colamonico, Starer and Morrissey spent the next several days investigating whether Crowley was masquerading as Jake Thomas. Then they confronted whomever was behind the Jake Thomas profile with their information, asking them to go live on the Signal video chat to prove their identity. The person would not do so.

On May 9, Jake Thomas was removed from the Signal and Facebook groups, said Starer.

That evening, Starer called Thomas' number on Signal, which allows person-to-person calls from people with whom you have had contact. On the fifth try, a man picked up. Starer said she told the man that it appeared that

Jake Thomas was actually Erin Crowley.

Starer said the man, who was curt with her, did not deny it.

Then a three-day-long Signal chat ensued between Starer and the Jake Thomas account, according to the chat on Starer's Signal feed, seen by this writer.

On the morning of May 10, one day after Thomas would not be identified, Thomas was upset about being kicked out.

"I have never experienced being thrown out of a group because I felt the same way," Thomas wrote at 10:34 a.m. "I'm a bit taken aback and bothered. The same people who stood up for someone not to be removed did the same to me, and I don't even understand why. Let's grab coffee one day and talk, but honestly that was pretty crappy. Made me feel like I should find another group who is more supportive of its members."

Starer said she looked forward to connecting.

"I just need to know that you are not Erin Crowley," wrote Starer at 10:44 a.m. "And then I will make that clear to everyone. That's the reason you were removed, not because you felt the same way as everyone. Please prove me wrong."

Starer hadn't heard a word by 5:44 p.m. She reached out again.

"If you do not want to demonstrate that you are Jake Thomas and not Erin Crowley, then I guess the documentation that we have will speak for itself," she wrote. "I would love to be wrong about this especially because I'd like to think that an elected official and Congressman Lawler's deputy district director is not posing as someone else to infiltrate groups that oppose the Congressman."

The person identifying as Thomas did not respond.

Crowley's rise in Putnam GOP circles

Crowley burst on the Putnam County political scene after moving to Mahopac in the early 2020s. Her star rose quickly in Republican circles. She mounted an improbable challenge in 2022 to Putnam Legislature Chairman Neal Sullivan, R-Mahopac. Sullivan failed to obtain enough valid signatures to appear on the ballot and Crowley was elected.

In 2023, she landed a job with Lawler to run his Putnam County district office in Carmel Town Hall. In 2025, she's paid at an annual rate of \$60,332, [based on her pay from January through March](#), according to Legistorm.com. Her husband, Kevin Osika, serves as a deputy sheriff in the Putnam County Sheriff's Department.

Crowley made the news in January after she was sued by a friend in Putnam County Supreme Court, seeking a judgment against her for allegedly failing to repay a \$40,000 loan that Crowley used to purchase a pontoon boat for cruises on Lake Mahopac. The case was settled, with attorneys for both parties agreeing to discontinue the matter on June 30.

More: [Dispute over \\$40K boat loan to Putnam legislator Crowley heads to court](#)

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David McKay Wilson is a columnist who writes about tax issues and government accountability. Follow him on Twitter [@davidmckay415](#) or email him at dwilson3@lohud.com.