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TWO DEFENDANTS EACH SENTENCED TO 30 YEARS IN PRISON FOR CHILD PORNOGRAPHY CHARGES

International Child Pornography Conspiracy Case Leads to Identification of Child Victims and Production of Child Pornography Charges

WASHINGTON – Two defendants were sentenced to prison today for their participation in an online child pornography conspiracy and for child pornography production charges, announced Assistant Attorney General Lanny A. Breuer of the Criminal Division, U.S. Attorney Joseph H. Hogsett of the Southern District of Indiana, U.S. Attorney Karen L. Loeffler of the District of Alaska, and U.S. Attorney Melinda Haag of the Northern District of California.

Charles Neyhart, 34, of Chugiak, Alaska, was sentenced today to 30 years in prison for his role in the child pornography conspiracy and for charges of child pornography production. Richard Schweich, 40, of San Jose, Calif., was sentenced to 30 years in prison for his participation in the conspiracy and for producing child pornography. Each defendant also was sentenced to lifetime supervised release following their respective prison terms. Both defendants were sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge William T. Lawrence in Indianapolis.

Neyhart pleaded guilty on April 7, 2010, to one count of conspiracy to advertise child pornography, one count of conspiracy to distribute child pornography, 13 counts of advertising child pornography and two counts of distributing child pornography. Neyhart also pleaded guilty to a criminal information charging him with three counts of producing child pornography between February and June 2009. According to the criminal information filed in the District of Alaska, Neyhart produced sexually explicit photographs of a 10 year-old girl in West Virginia and transported the photographs to his home in Alaska.

On June 15, 2010, Schweich pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to advertise child pornography, one count of conspiracy to distribute child pornography, 13 counts of advertising child pornography and two counts of distributing child pornography in conjunction with the child pornography conspiracy. Schweich also pleaded guilty to a criminal information filed in the Northern District of California, charging him with one count of producing child pornography. According to the criminal information, Schweich produced sexually explicit photographs of an 11 year-old girl in January 2008.

The charges against Neyhart, Schweich and 24 co-defendants are a result of “Operation Nest Egg,” an ongoing and joint investigation led by the Criminal Division’s Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS), the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of Indiana, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service (USPIS) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). Operation Nest Egg, launched in February 2008, targeted 26 defendants charged in the Southern District of Indiana, as well as approximately 500 additional individuals located throughout the world for their involvement in an online group dedicated to trading images of child pornography.

According to court documents filed in the Southern District of Indiana, the 26 co-conspirators participated in a sophisticated, password-protected Internet bulletin board group, which existed to allow members to meet like-minded individuals with a sexualized interest in children, to discuss that interest and to trade images of child pornography. The defendants are charged with conspiring to advertise and distribute child pornography, along with substantive counts of advertising and distributing child pornography. Twenty-two of the 26 defendants charged in the conspiracy have been arrested and 20 of the 22 individuals arrested have been convicted or have pleaded guilty. Seventeen defendants have been sentenced to prison on previous dates.

Four of the 26 individuals charged in the conspiracy remain at large and are known only by their online identities. Efforts to identify and apprehend these four individuals continue.

To date, as a result of Operation Nest Egg, more than 80 searches have been conducted in the United States. In total, more than 50 individuals have been arrested and 43 individuals have been convicted. The investigation is ongoing. Numerous members of the Internet-based bulletin board were found to have been personally sexually abusing children and to date, 16 child victims have been identified through Operation Nest Egg. For example, the 10 year-old child depicted in the sexually explicit photographs recovered from Charles Neyhart’s home was identified through an extensive investigation conducted by ICE, the Anchorage Police Department, the Alaska State Troopers and the West Virginia State Police. An extensive investigation conducted by USPIS and the San Jose Police Department led to the identification of the 11 year-old girl depicted in the sexually explicit photographs produced by Richard Schweich.

Additionally, lead administrator Delwyn Savigar of the United Kingdom, was identified and arrested in partnership with the U.K.’s Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, for his involvement in the conspiracy. After his initial arrest, Savigar was identified through DNA testing as the perpetrator of a previously unsolved sexual assault against a minor female in Great Britain, to which he pleaded guilty. Following this discovery, Savigar was linked to additional incidents of sexual assaults. Ultimately, he pleaded guilty to either abusing or attempting to abuse three minors from 1999 to 2002. He was sentenced to 14 years in prison in the United Kingdom.

This case was brought as part of Project Safe Childhood, a nationwide initiative to combat the growing epidemic of child sexual exploitation and abuse, launched in May 2006 by the Department of Justice. Led by U.S. Attorneys' Offices and the Criminal Division's Child Exploitation and Obscenity Section (CEOS), Project Safe Childhood marshals federal, state and local resources to better locate, apprehend and prosecute individuals who exploit children via the Internet, as well as to identify and rescue victims. For more information about Project Safe Childhood, please visit www.projectsafechildhood.gov.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Steven D. DeBrotta of the Southern District of Indiana, Assistant U.S. Attorney Audrey J. Renschen of the District of Alaska, Assistant U.S. Attorney Hanley Chew of the Northern District of California and CEOS Trial Attorney Alecia Riewerts Wolak. The investigation was conducted jointly by CEOS' High Technology Investigative Unit, USPIS and ICE, with assistance provided by the Indiana Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Taskforce, Indiana State Police, the Anchorage Police Department, the Alaska State Troopers, the West Virginia State Police, the San Jose Police Department and numerous local and international law enforcement agencies across the United States and Europe.

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