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Department of Justice

U.S. Attorney's Office

Southern District of Georgia

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Thursday, August 23, 2018

Statement from U.S. Attorney Bobby L. Christine Regarding Sentencing for Reality Winner

AUGUSTA, GA: The sentence rendered today is the longest received by a defendant for an unauthorized disclosure of national defense information to the media. It appropriately satisfies the need for both punishment and deterrence in light of the nature and seriousness of the offense.

When Reality Winner committed her crime, she was employed as a contractor at a National Security Agency facility in the Southern District of Georgia. She held a TOP SECRET/SCI security clearance, had access to classified information, had signed multiple nondisclosure agreements, and plainly abused her position of trust.

Winner was well-trained in the proper handling of classified intelligence and knew the damage that unauthorized disclosures could cause to our national security. She knew that the unauthorized removal of classified materials and transportation and storage of these materials in unauthorized locations risked disclosure and transmission of those materials. In particular, she knew that the unauthorized disclosure of information classified TOP SECRET, which is the highest classification level, reasonably could be expected to cause exceptionally grave damage to the national security of the United States, and that violation of rules governing the handling of classified information could result in criminal prosecution.

With this knowledge, Winner searched for, identified, and printed an intelligence report, which was classified at the TOP SECRET/SCI level and contained national defense information. The information in

the report was unrelated to Winner’s job duties, and she did not possess a “need to know.” Nevertheless, Winner removed the report from its authorized location and put it in a mailbox in an envelope addressed to a news agency. In so doing, **she knowingly and intentionally betrayed the trust of her colleagues and her country.**

Make no mistake: THIS WAS NOT A VICTIMLESS CRIME. Winner’s purposeful violation put our nation’s security at risk. Not in a speculative or hypothetical way, but in a very real, very direct way. The Intelligence Report that Winner disclosed described intelligence activities by a foreign government directed at targets within the United States. When asked by the FBI, Winner stated that she knew the Intelligence Report revealed “sources and methods” used by U.S. intelligence agencies, and she knew that compromising those sources and methods could be valuable to our adversaries and damaging to the United States. **Despite this knowledge**, Winner said she intended for a news agency to publish the contents of the Intelligence Report.

The document Winner compromised did, in fact, contain TOP SECRET information about the sources and methods used to acquire the intelligence described in the report. That means it revealed how U.S. Intelligence Agencies obtained information. U.S. Government subject matter experts have determined that Winner’s willful, purposeful disclosure caused exceptionally grave damage to U.S. national security. **That harm included, but was not limited to, impairing the ability of the United States to acquire foreign intelligence information similar to the information the defendant disclosed.** This was, by no means, a victimless crime.

What’s more, Winner’s exceptionally damaging disclosure was not a spontaneous, unplanned event, but was the calculated culmination of a series of acts. She researched whether it was possible to insert a thumb drive into a Top Secret computer without being detected, and then inserted a thumb drive, WHICH THE GOVERNMENT NEVER RECOVERED, into a Top Secret computer. She researched job opportunities that would provide her access to classified information. At the same time, she searched for information about anti-secrecy organizations, and she celebrated claimed compromises in U.S. classified information.

Approximately eight days before she started work as a contractor with a security clearance, Winner installed *sophisticated software tools on her computer designed to render her internet activity anonymous and untraceable*. Two days before starting work, Winner captured an image of a webpage listing eight “securedrop” addresses for media outlets seeking leaked information. Then, her first day on the job, she sent messages mocking her security training. On that same day, Winner signed a non-disclosure agreement with the government in which she promised to keep secret classified information, and attested she was accepting this responsibility “...without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion.” Yet, she wrote shortly thereafter that she was “#gonnafail” her polygraph examination when asked if she had “ever plotted against” the government. She claimed to hate America. When asked, “...you don’t actually hate America, right?” she responded, “I mean yeah I do its literally the worst thing to happen on the planet.”

She was the quintessential example of an insider threat.

Resolving this case with a plea agreement involving a lengthy prison sentence is the best resolution for the United States. The United States has to balance the need for prosecution with the damage that further disclosure of classified information at trial might cause. Proving the government’s case at trial

would require the government to declassify or risk disclosure of TOP SECRET//SCI information. This plea affords the government a substantial benefit in protecting from disclosure information that is still classified. The FBI and members of the Intelligence Community affected by Winner's treachery and betrayal have concurred in this judgement.

This sentence also promotes respect for the law and affords deterrence to similar criminal conduct in the future. Winner will serve a term of incarceration that will give pause to others who are entrusted with our country's sensitive national security information and would consider compromising it. Anyone else who may think of committing such an egregious and damaging wrong should think both of the prison sentence imposed today and the very real damage done, and we sincerely hope that they will stay true to their oath and maintain the secrets with which their nation has entrusted them.

The brave men and women who have volunteered – without mental reservation or purpose of evasion - to serve at sensitive government facilities continue to have our trust, faith and confidence. Their loyalty to our nation is manifest each day in the form of our safety and security. My dedication to those professionals and those principles is unwavering, and the Justice Department will continue to prosecute and bring long sentences to those who would betray their oath and jeopardize our nation's safety.

For any questions, please contact the United States Attorney's Office at (912) 652-4422.

Component(s):

USAO - Georgia, Southern

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