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Four Individuals Indicted in Virginia Dog Fighting Venture

(Richmond, Virginia) - Purnell Peace, age 35, of Virginia Beach, Virginia; Quanis Phillips, age 28, of Atlanta, Georgia; Tony Taylor, age 34, of Hampton, Virginia; and Michael Vick, age 27, of Atlanta, Georgia, were indicted today by a federal grand jury for conspiracy to travel in interstate commerce in aid of unlawful activities ("Travel Act"), and to sponsor a dog in an animal fighting venture, in violation of federal law. Chuck Rosenberg, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Virginia, and Brian L. Haaser, Special Agent-in-Charge, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General, Northeast Region, made the announcement.

If convicted on the Travel Act portion of the conspiracy charge, each defendant faces a statutory maximum of five years in prison, a \$250,000 fine, and full restitution. If convicted on the animal fighting venture portion of the conspiracy charge, each defendant faces one year in prison, a \$100,000 fine, or both. The indictment also includes a forfeiture allegation seeking recovery of any property constituting, or derived from, proceeds obtained directly or indirectly as a result of these offenses.

According to the indictment, the defendants were involved in an ongoing animal fighting venture based out of a property located in Smithfield, Virginia, from early 2001 through on or about April 25, 2007. The property was purchased by Vick in June 2001. Since that time, the named defendants formed a dog fighting enterprise known as "Bad Newz Kennels" and used the property for housing and training pit bulls used in dog fights. From at least 2002, the defendants and others sponsored dog fights at the property, where participants and dogs traveled from South Carolina, North Carolina, Maryland, New York, Texas, Alabama, and other states to participate. Generally, only those accompanying the opposing kennels and "Bad Newz Kennels" associates attended the fights. For a particular dog fight, the participants would establish a purse for the winning side, ranging from the hundreds to thousands of dollars. Participants and spectators would also place side-bets on the fight. The dog fight would last until the death or surrender of

the losing dog. At the end of the fight, the losing dog was sometimes put to death by drowning, hanging, gunshot, electrocution, or another method.

The indictment also alleges that the defendants participated in dog fights at locations other than the property in Smithfield. For these events, various members of “Bad Newz Kennels” would travel to other parts of Virginia and across state lines to participate in dog fights at other venues. The indictment alleges that the defendants and the “Bad Newz Kennels” dogs participated in dog fights in North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland, New Jersey, and elsewhere in Virginia.

The indictment also includes allegations about the defendants “testing” the pit bulls in their inventory, to determine if particular dogs were good fighters. Sometimes, the dogs deemed not to be good fighters were be put to death. In the summer of 2002, at various times, Peace, Phillips, Taylor, and Vick performed “testing” sessions at the property in Smithfield. Following some of these sessions, the dogs that did not perform well were put to death by Peace, Phillips, or Taylor. Further, in April 2007, an additional “testing” session was performed by Peace, Phillips, and Vick. Following that session, the indictment alleges that approximately eight dogs were put to death by hanging, drowning, and/or slamming at least one dog’s body to the ground.

The investigation has been a cooperative effort involving, among other agencies, the United States Department of Agriculture, Office of Inspector General; Virginia State Police; and the Surry County Sheriff’s Office. Assistant United States Attorneys Michael Gill and Brian Whisler are prosecuting the case on behalf of the United States. The federal investigation into the defendants’ criminal conduct is continuing.

Criminal indictments are only charges and not evidence of guilt. A defendant is presumed to be innocent until and unless proven guilty.

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