

2 plead guilty in scheme to sell President Biden's daughter's diary



President Biden walks on the beach with daughter Ashley Biden in Rehoboth Beach, Del., in June.

(Manuel Balce Ceneta / Associated Press)

BY THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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NEW YORK —

Two Florida residents have pleaded guilty in a scheme to peddle a diary and other items belonging to President Biden's daughter to the right-wing group Project Veritas for \$40,000, prosecutors said Thursday.

Aimee Harris and Robert Kurlander pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit interstate transportation of stolen property, Manhattan U.S. Atty. Damian Williams' office said.

“Harris and Kurlander sought to profit from their theft of another person’s personal property, and they now stand convicted of a federal felony as a result,” Williams said in a statement.

Harris’ lawyer, Sam Talkin, said she “has accepted responsibility for her conduct and looks forward to moving on with her life.” Kurlander’s lawyer, Florian Miedel, declined to comment.

Harris, 40, of Palm Beach, and Kurlander, 58, face up to five years in prison when sentenced.

Although authorities didn’t identify Ashley Biden or the organization that paid, the details of the investigation have been laid out in court filings and public statements from Project Veritas.

Ashley Biden was moving out of a friend’s Delray Beach, Fla., home in spring 2020 when she stored the diary, tax records, a digital device with family photos, a cellphone and other items there, prosecutors said in a court filing.

They said Harris then moved into the same room, stole the items and got in touch with Kurlander, who contacted Project Veritas, which asked for photos of the material and then paid for the two to bring the diary and photos to New York.

Project Veritas staffers met with the two in New York and dispatched them back to Florida to retrieve more of Ashley Biden’s items from the home, which they did and turned the material over to a local Project Veritas worker who brought it to New York, prosecutors said. The group paid the two \$20,000 apiece, prosecutors said.

A message seeking comment was sent to Project Veritas. The group has said it received the diary from “tipsters” who said it had been abandoned in a room. Project Veritas said it turned over the journal to law enforcement and never did anything illegal.

Founder James O’Keefe has said that Project Veritas ultimately did not publish information from the diary because it could not confirm it belonged to Ashley Biden.

Project Veritas, which identifies itself as a news organization, is best known for conducting hidden-camera stings that have sought to embarrass news outlets, labor organizations and Democratic politicians. It has been known to advance conspiracy theories, and its reports have been criticized as misleading and deceptive.

The FBI searched the group's New York offices and the homes of some of its employees as part of the inquiry. A court in New York appointed a former federal judge to review material that was seized in those searches, so as to ensure that investigators couldn't look at material protected by journalistic or attorney-client privileges.

Neither the group nor any of its staff has been charged to date.

Generally, media organizations aren't culpable for receiving material that might have been stolen, if they weren't involved in the theft. But there can be criminal liability for encouraging theft and then knowingly paying for stolen material.

"There is no First Amendment protection for the theft and interstate transport of stolen property," the U.S. attorney's office wrote in a court filing last year.