

PRESS RELEASE

Spokane Resident Pleads Guilty to Fraudulently Obtaining More than \$360,000 in COVID- 19 Relief Funding

Wednesday, May 31, 2023

For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Eastern District of Washington

Spokane, Washington – Vanessa R. Waldref, the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Washington, announced today that Marisa Beck, age 40, of Spokane, pled guilty to fraudulently obtaining more than \$360,000 in COVID-19 relief funding intended for endangered small businesses. United States District Judge Mary K. Dimke accepted Ms. Beck’s guilty plea and set sentencing for September 27, 2023, at 11 a.m., in Spokane. This conviction is the eighth felony conviction announced by the Eastern Washington COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force, which launched in 2022.

On March 27, 2020, the President signed into law the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act. The CARES Act provided a number of programs through which eligible small businesses could request and obtain relief funding intended to mitigate the economic impacts of the pandemic for small and local businesses. One such program, the Paycheck Protection Program (PPP), provided forgivable loans to eligible small businesses to retain jobs and maintain payroll during the pandemic. Another program, the Economic Injury Disaster Loan (EIDL) program, provided low-interest bridge funding for small businesses placed at risk during the pandemic.

“COVID-19 relief programs quickly ran out of money due to the number of businesses that requested funding, meaning that struggling, deserving small businesses were not able to obtain critically needed funding to keep their businesses afloat during the shutdowns and disruptions caused by the COVID pandemic,” said U.S. Attorney Waldref. “We created the Eastern Washington COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force because it is critical to the strength and safety of our communities that we all work together to

combat pandemic-related fraud and bring much-needed accountability to these programs. The Strike Force works to ensure that limited resources are used to protect our local small businesses and the critical jobs and services that they provide for the community."

In February 2022, U.S. Attorney Waldref and the U.S. Attorney's Office began working with federal law enforcement agencies to create and launch a COVID-19 Fraud Strike Force that would leverage partnerships between different agencies to aggressively investigate and prosecute fraud against COVID-19 relief programs in Eastern Washington. The Strike Force consists of agency representatives from the U.S. Attorney's Office, Small Business Administration (SBA) Office of Inspector General (OIG), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), U.S. Department of the Treasury Inspector General for Tax Administration (TIGTA), U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs OIG, General Services Administration OIG, Internal Revenue Service, Department of Energy OIG, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) OIG, Department of Labor OIG, Air Force Office of Special Investigations, and others. Cases investigated and prosecuted by the Strike Force have resulted in numerous indictments and convictions, and have recovered millions of dollars in penalties and restitution for the public.

In the plea agreement accepted by the court, and in information disclosed during court proceedings, Ms. Beck admitted to fraudulently obtaining \$368,829 in PPP and EIDL funding for three purported businesses: Cyra Solar LLC, Beck N' Call Landscape, LLC, and Value in People Consulting, LLC. Ms. Beck admitted that these entities were not eligible for CARES Act funding because Beck N' Call Landscape and Cyra Solar were not active businesses as of February 2020, and because she submitted false and fraudulent payroll, revenue, and other information associated with the three purported businesses in order to fraudulently obtain CARES Act funding.

"I commend the stellar investigative work on these cases performed by the Strike Force and especially in this case by VA OIG," said U.S. Attorney Waldref. "We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to strengthen our communities by protecting our small and local businesses."

The charges to which Beck pled carries a maximum sentence of up to 5 years in federal prison. The cases were investigated by the Eastern Washington COVID Fraud Strike Force, and in particular by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General, Spokane Resident Office, with investigative assistance and support from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Spokane Resident Agency, the Small Business Administration Office of Inspector General, Western Regional Office, and the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigative Division, Seattle Field Office. Assistant United

States Attorneys Dan Fruchter and Tyler H.L. Tornabene are prosecuting this case on behalf of the United States.

Case No. 2:23-cr-00055-MKD

Contact

Richard Barker
Assistant United States Attorney and Public Affairs Officer
509-835-6311 or richard.barker@usdoj.gov

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