

DETROIT NATIVE SUN

Leader of The Base sentenced

LANSING - The leader of The Base - a national white supremacist group that advocates for violence against the government - was sentenced by a Tuscola County court, Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel recently announced.

Justen Watkins, 25, of Bad Axe was sentenced to 32 months-4 years for conspiring to train for a civil disorder and a mandatory consecutive 2 years for felony firearm by Judge Amy Gierhart of the Tuscola County Circuit Court. One of the charges filed against Watkins - conspiring to train for a civil disorder - marked the first time a defendant has faced the felony in Michigan's history.

"The tragic event in Buffalo that resulted in 10 people being murdered and another three injured is an example of why we must prosecute and pursue these types of crimes to deter others from contemplating such acts of violence," said Nessel. "Securing these convictions on the conspiracy to train for civil disorder creates a historic precedent in our state's court system and conveys the real danger domestic terrorism poses here and around the country. (The) sentencing is recognition by the court of the serious nature of these crimes and demonstrates the willingness of our justice system to hold accountable those who commit crimes in the name of overthrowing our government or perpetuating racist ideologies. I appreciate the work of our law enforcement partners at all levels to help bring these criminals to justice."

The cases resulted from joint investigations by the Michigan State Police (MSP) Caro Post and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF).

BACKGROUND

In October 2020, Justen Watkins was charged in connection to a December 2019 incident in which a Dexter family was terrorized at their home after Watkins used intimidation tactics and posted messages to other members of The Base targeting the home.

U.S. Election crisis addressed in new legislation

PRNewswire/ -- Election experts recently released model legislation to address unprecedented voting irregularities in the 2020 election in an effort to ensure transparent, inclusive, and accountable elections and to restore public trust in elections.

The Amistad Project and the American Voters' Alliance have long investigated the causes for election failures in 2020 to develop an effective response. The model legislation creates bipartisan election oversight committees, expands transparency requirements to the USPS, requires voter marked paper ballots, creates penalties for ballot larceny, requires equal treatment of voters' and ballots, and prohibits private monies from being used in government election offices.

"Amistad and The American Voters' Alliance have a great understanding of the importance of transparent, inclusive, and accountable elections, and have fashioned a comprehensive approach that addresses the challenges of modern elections which deserves bipartisan support," commented Ken Blackwell, former Secretary of State of Ohio.

"Good government requires connecting legal authority to public accountability and, unfortunately, state legislators across the nation have ceded their constitutional and legal authority to manage elections to unaccountable and unelected local bureaucrats," stated Jacqueline Timmer, Executive Director of The American Voters' Alliance. "Our model legislation makes legislators accountable through a joint-standing committee which must issue a public report after each election identifying all violations of law and irregularities after each election."

Watkins faced the following charges in Washtenaw County in that case:

- gang membership, a 20-year felony;
- unlawful posting of a message, a two-year felony and/or a \$5,000 fine; and using computers to commit a crime, a four-year felony and/or \$5,000 fine.

Following the authorization of the Washtenaw County charges, the involved agencies found evidence of Watkins and two other members of The Base - Thomas Denton and Tristan Webb - entering two former and vacant Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC) sites in the city of Caro a few weeks prior to the charges being filed.

The men assessed the properties as potential future training grounds for "hate camps", which is what the group named their paramilitary firearms training exercises.

The charges, co-prosecuted with Tuscola County Prosecutor Mark Reese, were the following in Tuscola County against Watkins:

- one count of larceny in a building, a four-year felony;
- one count of gang membership, a 20-year felony;
- one count of conspiracy to train with firearms for a civil disorder, four-year felony; and
- one count of felony firearm, two-year felony.

Founded in 2018, The Base - which is the literal translation of "Al-Qaeda" in English - is a white supremacy gang that openly advocates for violence and criminal acts against the U.S., and purports to be training for a race war to establish white ethnonationalist rule in areas of the U.S., including Michigan's Upper Peninsula. The group also traffics in Nazi ideology and extreme anti-Semitism.

Watkins claims to be the leader of The Base, and reportedly ran a "hate camp" for members of the group, where he led tactical and firearms training for participants with the goal of being prepared for the violent overthrow of the government.

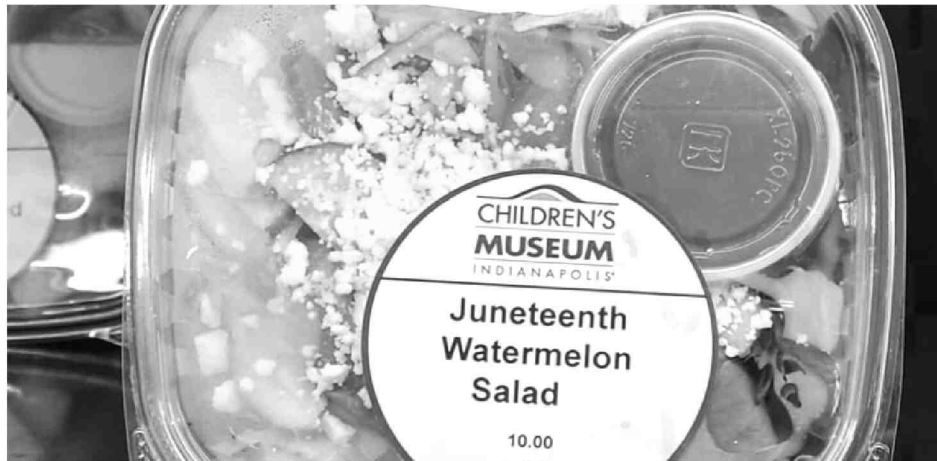
"Nobody has done a comprehensive model law like this until now," explained John Loudon, a former Missouri state representative and state senator who helped devise the model legislation. "We took a systemic approach that anticipates loopholes others have never imagined while also closing loopholes that have been exploited in past elections."

"The American Voters' Alliance and The Amistad Project have created a detailed roadmap for state legislators to protect all voters on a bipartisan basis which protects vulnerable voters," said Lori Roman, President of American Constitutional Rights Union Action Fund. "The ACRU created the Vulnerable Voters Project in 2020 which revealed illegal or unethical intimidation of elderly nursing home voters and ballot harvesting in numerous senior care facilities. The AVA and Amistad proposals address these concerns."

"In 2020 election officials kicked America out of the counting room and invited billionaires in while creating egregious breaches in ballot chain of custody and treating voters and ballots differently, creating unparalleled lawlessness in the election. The refusal of local election officials to be open to review of their management of the election and to respond to reasonable demands for transparency continue to diminish faith in the election process and violate a hallmark of democratic government by rejecting accountability," added Phill Kline, former Kansas Attorney General and Director of the Amistad Project. "This legislation will once again allow American citizens to hold government officials accountable for how they manage elections."

For more information, please visit: AVAModelLaw.org.

Tone deaf corporate America blasted for trying to 'Own Juneteenth'



By Stacy M. Brown
NNPA Newswire National Correspondent
@StacyBrownMedia

In 2021, President Joe Biden signed a bill to officially mark Juneteenth - June 19 - as an official federal holiday.

One year later, as racism continues to permeate the nation and many African Americans prepare to observe the country's 12th federal holiday, corporate America remains tone-deaf at best.

Social media users and others have lashed out at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis for offering a pre-packaged watermelon salad as part of its Juneteenth menu.

The museum circulated a photo of the salad as it invited the public to its Juneteenth celebration.

"This is ridiculous and a mockery of Juneteenth," Twitter user @WishYaHadAlexis wrote. "I've never had a watermelon salad or even heard of it. SMH."

Another Twitter user, @MajorFactor2, said, "There can't possibly be any Black folks in these boardrooms when decisions like this are being made."

Initially, museum officials attempted to justify the offensive gaffe by noting that the watermelon salad has remained a staple in their food court's manager's family's Juneteenth celebration.

Later, they released a statement apologizing.

"As a museum, we apologize and acknowledge the negative impact that stereotypes have on communities of color," officials wrote. "The salad has been removed from the menu. We are currently reviewing how we may best convey these stories and traditions during this year's Juneteenth celebration as well as making changes around how our food service provider makes future food selections."

The statement continued:

"There should have been a label explaining the history and meaning behind this menu item, and it should not have been on the shelf before that label was ready."

"We understand how this appears with no context, and we apologize. However, we are pulling it from our food court immediately until the sign is ready to accompany it."

According to the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, watermelon represents a racist stereotype that originated in the Jim Crow era.

Juneteenth recognized the date in 1865 when the last enslaved African Americans received official notice of their freedom.

That notice arrived two years after President Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation granting freedom to all enslaved people in Confederate states.

"First, the stupidity from Walmart and now the Indianapolis Children's Museum thought it was okay to have a watermelon salad to celebrate Juneteenth," Twitter user @MrsCMitch wrote.

"This is unbelievably insensitive and inappropriate."

Walmart came under fire earlier after the chain issued a new flavor of its ice cream and called it "Juneteenth."

Immediately, Walmart received criticism for attempting to cash in on the newest holiday with the flavors that included swirled red velvet cake and cheesecake.

"We will remove the items as appropriate," Walmart officials said. "Juneteenth holiday marks a celebration of freedom and independence. However, we received feedback that a few items caused concern for some of our customers, and we sincerely apologize."

Bridge, an organization that promotes improving diversity and inclusion, called on Walmart to remove the ice cream flavors.

"Would you launch an ice cream called January 27? The day the world remembers the Holocaust. Or April 7, the day that memorializes the genocide in Rwanda. Of course not," Bridge officials wrote in a letter to Walmart.

They also took Walmart to task for placing a trademark indication on the word "Juneteenth."

"Placing a TM and claiming ownership of the word 'Juneteenth' further exacerbates the lack of understanding of laying claim to something that represents so much to an entire population," they wrote.

"Juneteenth simply cannot be owned."

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