U.S. Department of Justice

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JOINT TERRORISM TASK FORCE STRIPS WEST MEMPHIS CONVENIENCE STORE OPERATOR OF HIS U.S. CITIZENSHIP FOR NATURALIZATION FRAUD

Little Rock, AR -- Bud Cummins, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Arkansas, William Temple, Special Agent-in-Charge, FBI Little Rock Division and Rodrigo Reyes, Resident Agent-in-Charge of the Fort Smith, Arkansas Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) office, announced today that Hasan Ali Ayesh was sentenced to 5 years probation and his citizenship was revoked for structuring currency transactions to avoid federal reporting requirements (31 USC 5324), wire fraud, and naturalization fraud.

Ayesh, 42, a native Palestinian, was a United States citizen having been naturalized in 2001. Ayesh operated a convenience store in West Memphis, Arkansas where he also operated an un-licensed check cashing business. From March 1999 to May 2003, Ayesh structured 650 cash withdrawals of $9,900 for a total amount of $6,435,000 to avoid reporting requirements. The wire fraud scheme involved drafting a fake tax returns to inflate Ayesh's personal income and then faxing an income statement based on the tax returns to a mortgage company with an application.

During his citizenship interview, Ayesh swore he had not committed, been arrested and/or was involved in any criminal activity. Hasan later admitted that he attained his naturalization contrary to law by making a false statement under oath. The law requires the court to denaturalize an individual convicted of naturalization fraud. Pursuant to a plea agreement, Ayesh was sentenced to a term of probation but was taken into the custody of ICE for removal proceedings.

"It is a serious crime to lie in order to obtain U.S. Citizenship," Cummins stated. "Naturalized citizenship in this country is a privilege–and this individual abused that privilege."

The case is the result of an coordinated investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation Joint Terrorism Task Force (FBI JTTF), including the FBI, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), Internal Revenue Service (IRS-CI) Criminal Investigation, Arkansas State Police (ASP), West Memphis Police Department (WMPD) and the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

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