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U.S. Entertainer Convicted of Engaging in Foreign Influence Campaign

Rapper, Businessman Found Guilty in Back-Channel Lobbying Campaign to Drop 1MDB Investigation and Remove Chinese National from United States, and Conspiring to Make and Conceal Foreign Contributions During 2012 U.S. Presidential Election

A federal jury convicted a U.S. entertainer and businessman today for orchestrating an unregistered, back-channel campaign beginning in or about 2017 to influence the then-administration of the President of the United States and the Department of Justice to drop the investigation of Jho Low and others for embezzlement and other offenses in connection with the international strategic and development company known as 1Malaysia Development Berhad (1MDB), and to send a Chinese national back to China, as well as conspiring to make and conceal foreign and conduit campaign contributions during the 2012 U.S. presidential election.

According to court documents and evidence presented at trial, Prakazrel “Pras” Michel, 50, of Coconut Creek, Florida, conspired with Low Taek Jho, aka Jho Low, of Malaysia; Elliott Broidy; Nickie Lum Davis; George Higginbotham; and others to engage in undisclosed lobbying campaigns at the direction of Low and the Vice Minister of Public Security for the People’s Republic of China, respectively, to have the 1MDB embezzlement investigation and forfeiture proceedings involving Low and others dropped and to have a Chinese national sent back to China.

“As proven at trial, the defendant engaged in an extensive conspiracy to use millions of dollars in foreign funds to engage in illegal back-channel lobbying and make unlawful campaign contributions,” said Assistant Attorney General Kenneth A. Polite, Jr. of the Justice Department’s Criminal Division. “Today’s verdict demonstrates that anyone who engages in unlawful foreign-sponsored efforts to influence American officials, our elections, or the criminal justice system will be brought to justice.”

“Mr. Michel sought to use his celebrity and access to influence U.S. government officials on behalf of undisclosed foreign interests,” said Assistant Attorney General Matthew G. Olsen of the Justice Department’s National Security Division. “This is an affront to the rule of law, and we will use the full range of tools at our disposal to hold accountable those who would covertly aid foreign actors seeking to interfere with our democratic system of government.”

Michel also conspired with Low to orchestrate and conceal a foreign and conduit contribution scheme in which they funneled millions of dollars of Low’s money into the 2012 U.S. presidential election as purportedly legitimate campaign contributions, all while concealing the true source of the money. Michel received Low’s money and contributed it both personally and through approximately 20 straw donors. Michel also caused a presidential joint fundraising committee and an independent expenditure committee to submit false reports to the Federal Election Commission (FEC). In addition, Michel personally submitted a false declaration to the

FEC, conspired to commit money laundering and make false statements to financial institutions related to the foreign influence campaigns, and attempted to cause witnesses to make false statements to and withhold information from law enforcement officials about the scheme.

“Michel played a central role in a wide-ranging conspiracy to improperly influence top government officials, including the then-President of the United States and the then-Attorney General,” said Special Agent in Charge Harry A. Lidsky of the Department of Justice Office of the Inspector General (DOJ-OIG) Cyber Investigations Office. “The DOJ-OIG uncovered this activity in 2017 and led an exhaustive investigation which culminated today with the conviction of the fourth charged conspirator. I would like to thank the members of the jury for their time and careful deliberation of the facts.”

“The defendant brazenly conspired to help a foreign national launder millions of dollars in illegitimate campaign contributions into the 2012 U.S. presidential election,” Assistant Director Luis Quesada of the FBI’s Criminal Investigative Division. “The FBI and our partners are dedicated to uncovering even the most sophisticated schemes which could undermine our fair and transparent democratic process.”

Michel was convicted of conspiracy, concealment of material facts, making false entries in records, witness tampering, and serving as an unregistered agent of a foreign power. He faces a maximum penalty of 20 years in prison on the top counts. A sentencing date has not yet been set. A federal district court judge will determine any sentence after considering the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines and other statutory factors.

Broidy [pleaded guilty](#) for his role in the scheme on Oct. 20, 2020, in the District of Columbia. He received a full presidential pardon on Jan. 19, 2021.

Higginbotham [pleaded guilty](#) for his role in the scheme on Nov. 30, 2018, in the District of Columbia. He will be sentenced at a later date.

Lum Davis [pleaded guilty](#) for her role in the scheme on Aug. 31, 2020, in the District of Hawaii. She was sentenced to two years in prison on Jan. 19.

Low was previously indicted and is a fugitive.

The DOJ-OIG and the FBI Los Angeles Field Office and International Corruption Squad in New York investigated the case.

Principal Deputy Chief John D. Keller, Election Crimes Branch Director of Enforcement and Litigation Sean F. Mulryne, and Trial Attorney Nicole R. Lockhart of the Criminal Division’s Public Integrity Section are prosecuting the case.