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NNHRC witnesses Beebe's and Sanford's federal sentencing today

First defendants to be charged under the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act

ST. MICHAELS, Ariz.—Earlier today, Navajo human rights official witnessed the sentencing of Paul Beebe and Jesse Sanford of Farmington, N.M., at the U.S. District Court for the District of New Mexico in Santa Fe for a hate crime the defendants committed against Vincent Kee, Navajo.

According to a press release issued by the U.S. Department of Justice today, “Beebe was sentenced to eight and a half years in prison followed by three years supervised release. Sanford was sentenced to five years in prison followed by three years supervised release.”

On August 18, 2011, Beebe entered a guilty plea to one count of violating the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention law and Sanford pled guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit a federal hate crime.

“During the plea hearing [on August 18, 2011], Beebe and Sanford admitted that Beebe took the victim to Beebe’s apartment, which was adorned in racist paraphernalia, including a Nazi flag and a woven dream catcher with a swastika in it. After the victim had fallen asleep, the defendants began defacing the victim’s body by drawing on him with blue, red, and black markers. Once the victim awoke, Beebe branded the victim, who sat with a towel in his mouth, by heating a wire hanger on a stove and burning the victim’s flesh, causing a permanent deep impression of a swastika in his skin. The defendants used a cell phone to create a recording of the victim in which they coerced him to agree to the brand,” according to a press release issued in August by the U.S. Department of Justice District of New Mexico Public Affairs Officer Elizabeth Martinez.

Moments before Beebe’s and Sanford’s sentencing, Kee’s mother Bernice Silversmith addressed the judge with a Navajo greeting of well wishes, “Ya’at’eeh abini,” explained she was as the mother of Vincent and said, “I would like to express my extreme disgust for the actions that Mr. Sanford and Mr. Beebe took against my son.”

Silversmith continued and said,

“They took something from him that he can never fully recover. They took away his trust in people. Before these men manipulated and attacked Vincent he was

like a butterfly. He fluttered along making friends with people, greeting and shaking hands never realizing that evil exists in certain people...

My son still cries when he has nightmare of this torture and as his mother I try my best to comfort him," said Bernice Silversmith who lovingly adopted Kee when he was an infant. She continued and said, "However, I cannot give the type of comfort and security that you can Judge Black because I cannot make sure these men stay in a place where they cannot torture another person."

Kee's mother had asked for maximum time allowed by the law.

The staff and commissioners of the Navajo Nation Human Rights Commission would like to acknowledge the courage and integrity of Vincent Kee and his family in seeking justice in the federal court.

Another defendant William Hatch has not been sentenced yet, according to the U.S. Department of Justice press release issued today.

Next, the state court will be sentencing Beebe and Sanford at a time to be determined.

NNHRC staff would like ask for your continued support and prayers as Mr. Vincent Kee and his family continue on their path for justice.

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