

PRESS RELEASE

# International Firearms Dealer Involved In \$2 Million COVID-19 Fraud Scheme Sentenced To More Than 7 Years In Federal Prison

Thursday, April 20, 2023

## For Immediate Release

U.S. Attorney's Office, Middle District of Florida

Orlando, Florida – U.S. District Judge Paul G. Byron has sentenced Daniel Ira Johnson (35, Orlando), a/k/a “Shotta” a/k/a “Lajon Black,” to seven years and six months in federal prison for shipping firearms to the United Kingdom and committing wire fraud and aggravated identity theft in connection with fraudulently obtaining COVID-19 unemployment insurance relief. Johnson had pleaded on December 27, 2022.

According to court documents, Johnson shipped firearms to a conspirator in Rugby England in December 2019 and January 2020. He concealed the firearms in a safe, wrapping them to avoid detection, and declaring them to be “car parts” on customs paperwork. After the global COVID-19 pandemic and in March 2020, following the government response of extending and expanding unemployment insurance benefits, Johnson and conspirators used personal identification information from real individuals, without their knowledge, to apply for and obtain unemployment insurance benefits. Those benefits were loaded onto debit cards that were delivered to addresses Johnson and others accessed and the fraud proceeds were quickly withdrawn from those cards or used to purchase U.S. postal money orders. Johnson participated by exchanging PII with conspirators, withdrawing funds from ATMs, purchasing U.S. postal money orders, and instructing other conspirators as to how to use PII to file claims for unemployment insurance benefits. Johnson and his conspirators are linked to \$1.9 million in attempted fraudulent unemployment insurance claims in this scheme, over \$555,000 of which were paid.

“Daniel Johnson defrauded 19 different state workforce agencies by fraudulently collecting more than \$500,000 in Pandemic Unemployment Assistance. Johnson stole

unemployment benefits intended for American workers in need of assistance due to the COVID-19 pandemic. We will continue to work with our law enforcement partners to protect the integrity of all unemployment insurance benefit programs," said Mathew Broadhurst, Special Agent-in-Charge, Southeast Region, U.S. Department of Labor Office of Inspector General.

Special Agent in Charge Jonathan Carson of the U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Industry and Security, Miami Field Office stated, "The illegal smuggling of firearms from United States is a serious violation of our nation's export control laws. Along with our agency partners, we will pursue these violators wherever they are located-worldwide."

"Daniel Johnson's lawless pursuits have finally come to a halt, thanks to the collaborative efforts between the U.S. Postal Inspection Service and our federal partners," said Juan A. Vargas, Inspector in Charge of the Miami Division, U.S. Postal Inspection Service. "Today's sentencing should be a reminder to criminals that we will aggressively pursue those that aim to defraud innocent individuals."

"Disrupting the international flow of illegal guns inevitably saves lives and reduces crime both domestically and abroad. Stopping this scheme to illegally export weapons to the UK did just that," said Special Agent in Charge Katrina W. Berger, who oversees Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) operations in Georgia and Alabama. "Cases like this highlight the great results that can be achieved when agencies work together to protect our communities both here and abroad."

This case was investigated by the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the U.S. Department of Commerce Bureau of Industry and Security, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), and the U.S. Department of Labor OIG, with assistance from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the National Crime Agency of the United Kingdom. It is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Dana E. Hill.

*Updated April 20, 2023*

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