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Former NFL Player Sentenced to 2½ Years in Prison for Real Estate and Gold Mine Ponzi Scheme that Caused \$5.3 Million in Losses

LOS ANGELES – A former NFL linebacker was sentenced today to 30 months in federal prison for running a Ponzi scheme in which he defrauded victims out of more than \$5 million by lying to them that he was involved in lucrative luxury real estate investments, gold mines in Alaska and Ghana, and other ventures, and promising them high rates of return on their investments.

John Robert Leake, 43, of Plano, Texas, but who formerly resided in Marina del Rey, was sentenced by United States District Judge John F. Walter, who also ordered him to pay \$5,314,059 in restitution.

Leake pleaded guilty in September 2024 to one count of wire fraud and one count of transactional money laundering.

From June 2015 to March 2020, Leake solicited money from victims by falsely claiming that he was participating in multiple lucrative business ventures, including subletting luxury real estate properties and real estate investing. Leake offered his victims the opportunity to loan him funds for him to invest in these purported ventures in exchange for a high rate of return.

In fact, Leake knew these investment opportunities often were fabricated and non-existent and were devised by Leake to defraud victims and trick them into giving him money.

Leake duped his victims by lying that he had invested large amounts of his own money in the purported business ventures he promoted. Leake rarely invested his own money into them.

He also fraudulently offered to personally guarantee return of the victims' loans and provided them promissory notes purporting to memorialize his promise to repay the victims at a fixed rate of interest. Leake's lies to his victims included his claims that his business ventures were successful, and he had accumulated substantial personal assets and income. In fact, Leake lacked sufficient personal assets and income to repay his victims.

Once in receipt of the victim's money, Leake – without the victims' knowledge or consent – used some of the funds to pay his own personal expenses, including credit card bills, car payments, rent, and gambling expenses. To continue his scam, Leake also used some of the victims' money to lull victims by making purported "interest" and

“capital” payments on the promissory notes. Leake used a small amount of his personal funds to make these payments.

In total, Leake fraudulently received approximately \$8,129,450 from six victims, causing them a total loss of approximately \$5,314,059.

IRS Criminal Investigation investigated this matter.

Assistant United States Attorney James C. Hughes of the Major Frauds Section prosecuted this case.

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