



“Celebrity & Wealth”: Ex-Marine Paul Whelan’s Sister Livid After Biden Reaches Out To Griner’s Family

Description

USA: Given WNBA star Brittney Griner’s high-profile status and media visibility, President Joe Biden is under mounting pressure to bring her home, after on Thursday she pleaded guilty in a Russian court to drug charges after getting caught with Cannabis cartridges while going through a Moscow airport in February, just days prior to the Ukraine invasion.

But a top Russian diplomat disagrees that the highly covered court case is a ‘big deal’. Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov on Thursday dismissed what he called “hype” surrounding Griner’s detention in Russian jail. “The American side’s **attempts to foment hype** and make noise in the public environment are understandable, but they don’t help to practically resolve issues,” Ryabkov [told reporters](#) at the courthouse. Washington has slammed what it’s characterized as the Kremlin seeking to use a prominent US citizen as a political pawn amid the backdrop of war.

But Paul Whelan’s family also appears to agree that the Griner case is being unfairly prioritized by the White House. This after, as the The Hill and others reported, there was “a conversation between President Biden, Vice President Harris and Cherelle Griner, Brittany Griner’s wife, on Wednesday.” **Whelan, who is a US Marine veteran, has been in Russian detention for over three years.** He was arrested in Moscow in 2018 on charges of “carrying out an act of espionage,” and sentenced to a total of **16 years in prison**. His family is livid after news of the Biden phone call with Griner’s family, with Whelan’s sister saying she’s “crushed” by lack of the same or similar attention given to Whelan...

Still looking for that press release saying [@POTUS](#) has spoken to anyone in OUR family about [#PaulWhelan](#), wrongfully detained in [#Russia](#) for 3.5 years.

I am crushed. If he wants to talk about securing Paul’s release, he needs to be talking to the Whelans! What are we to think?! <https://t.co/jTirLwAHyF>

— elizabethwhelan (@elizabethwhelan) [July 6, 2022](#)

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” Elizabeth Whelan emphasized.

Apparently, Biden made the phone call to Griner’s family merely after a media outcry, but not to the Whelan’s even after Paul is set to languish for over a decade longer:

*The White House said Biden and Harris assured Cherelle Griner that they are providing **“all possible assistance” to bring home Brittney Griner**, who has been in detention in Russia since February.*

*Biden’s call to Cherelle Griner came after she told CBS it was **“very disheartening” not to have heard from the president directly**. Brittney Griner also wrote a letter to Biden urging him not to **“forget about me and the other American detainees.”***

Other members of the Whelan family are also livid, accusing the White House of playing favorites based on “celebrity and wealth”:

“I don’t begrudge Ms. Griner and her supporters their success in getting the president’s attention while he ignores so many other families,” Paul Whelan’s twin brother, David Whelan, said of Cherelle Griner’s interview, [according to The Detroit News](#).

***“It suggests the only way to get the White House’s attention, under President Trump or President Biden, is to have celebrity and wealth and resources that most wrongful detainees do not have,”** he added.*



Via Reuters

Back in 2018, when Whelan's verdict was read out loud in Moscow City Court, the former Marine stood in a defendants' cage holding a sign that read, "Sham Trial!" At the time of his arrest in Moscow by the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB), he was director of global security and investigations for a US-based auto parts manufacturing company named BorgWarner.

As for Griner, a number of pundits are now recalling the fact that she's in the past refused to stand or even be present for the national anthem before games, and yet is now pleading for the US government to secure her release...

Brittney Griner actively refused to be present during the playing of the U.S. National Anthem before games, and even demanded the Anthem and flag ceremony be avoided in all games.

I wonder what it feels like now with her begging the Red, White and Blue to come to her rescue? pic.twitter.com/Q9WHSU2SIB

— Errol Webber (@ErrolWebber) [July 7, 2022](#)

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Making her second appearance in a Moscow court Thursday, WNBA star and Olympic champion Brittney Griner has **pled guilty to drug charges under Russian law for which she could be given a maximum ten year sentence.**

"Brittney Griner pleaded guilty to drug smuggling charges as her trial continued in Russian court, admitting to bringing cannabis into the country but saying she had packed in a hurry and did not intend to break the law," [NPR](#) writes. "Russia continued to make its case against Griner at her trial on Thursday, more than 140 days since the WNBA star was arrested at a Moscow-area airport on drug charges."



WNBA star and two-time Olympic gold medalist Brittney Griner, via AP

At this point an expected conviction is considered very likely based on the guilty plea. She's been detained in Russia since before the war – arrested at a Moscow airport on Feb.17 for allegedly having cannabis oil on her possession, used for vaping.

Washington has viewed her case as one where Russia is attempting to gain leverage for negotiations, using Griner as a political pawn. Weeks ago the State Department officially deemed her status “wrongfully detained” – which implies she’s being viewed as hostage of a foreign state. This allows the federal government to negotiate her return.

Western officials have slammed a “show trial” now being conducted, but it’s a major step before possible negotiations for her return. And yet it remains that Griner pleading guilty to a crime under Russian law complicates matters, to say the least. According to analysis in ESPN:

*But before the trial even begins, U.S. experts and officials say Griner will be the subject of a show trial, and **a guilty verdict is almost a certainty**. The entire exercise, they say, is [a negotiation tactic](#) to push the Biden administration into trading for her freedom.*

“It’s a foregone conclusion and the trial is to uphold the state and confirm the power of the state,” says William Pomeranz, the acting director of the Wilson Center’s Kennan Institute in Washington and an expert on Russian law. “Justice is not the immediate issue.”

It’s likely that Griner will spend the whole proceedings in a steel cage, just as most Russian defendants in standard criminal cases.

LIVE: Outside the Russian court where U.S. basketball player Brittney Griner plead guilty to drugs charges <https://t.co/IGt9MaOVyG> <https://t.co/wlRRFXmki7>

— Reuters (@Reuters) [July 7, 2022](#)

Russia is recently hinted that it could be ready to negotiate a hostage swap for a **notorious arms trafficker named Viktor Bout**.

Griner had been spending off-seasons from the WNBA playing for a Russian team going back to 2016. According to one prior report she was given “red carpet” treatment and [paid very well](#):

Griner traveled to Russia to play for UMMC Ekaterinburg, which she has been doing since 2016. The team is reportedly backed by a large corporation.

*[An ESPN feature from May of that year](#) dug into Griner’s deal. UMMC Ekaterinburg provided each American player with a personal driver in addition to other amenities. “**The restaurants are good, the team pays well and takes care of every detail — chartering flights to away games, delivering bottled water to their apartments — the arena is always filled with locals, and the coaching staff**” was composed of many coaches Griner was familiar with from Phoenix Mercury.*

*Griner took the job to supplement her salary from the WNBA, which is something about half the league’s players do. For her first season, she was **paid a little less than \$1 million which was about four times the WNBA’s max annual salary**.*

There’s the possibility that she had already been waived through airports with banned vaping substances prior to her Feb.17 arrest, and that authorities may have known this – but the Kremlin could have been waiting for the politically opportune time to make headlines with the arrest.

by Tyler Durden

Category

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