



PRESS RELEASE

Internal Revenue Service - Criminal Investigation *Chief Richard Weber*

Date: November 17, 2016

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IRS – Criminal Investigation

CI Release #: CI-2016-11-17-B

Louisiana Check Cashers Sentenced For Conspiracy and Filing False Income Tax Return *Agree to Forfeit \$4.1 Million*

A Kenner, Louisiana couple was sentenced today for crimes related to the operation of their check cashing business, VJ Discount Inc., announced Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Caroline D. Ciralo, head of the Justice Department's Tax Division, and U.S. Attorney Kenneth A. Polite for the Eastern District of Louisiana.

Susantha Wijetunge, aka VJ, 52, was sentenced by U.S. District Court Judge Lance M. Africk of the Eastern District of Louisiana to serve 44 months in prison and his spouse, Manula Wijetunge, aka Manu, 48, was sentenced by Judge Africk to serve three years of probation. The Wijetunges owned VJ Discount Inc., a Louisiana corporation that operated a convenience store and check cashing business in Kenner. Susantha Wijetunge, VJ Discount Inc. and others cashed, for an inflated fee, fraudulently obtained tax refund checks for multiple co-conspirators. These transactions often involved multiple checks and tens of thousands of dollars. In an attempt to conceal this illegal activity, Susantha Wijetunge and others failed to file, or filed false, required currency transaction reports with the government.

Susantha Wijetunge also filed multiple false individual and corporate income tax returns that underreported income. The Wijetunges admitted that VJ Discount Inc. had third party check deposits totaling more than \$59 million in 2011; \$47 million in 2012; and \$66 million in 2013. Despite this large volume of business, the Wijetunges' individual income tax returns reported total income of less than \$100,000 per year.

In March 2016, Susantha Wijetunge **pleaded guilty** to conspiring to defraud the United States and to committing mail and wire fraud, and Manula Wijetunge pleaded guilty to willfully filing a false 2013 individual income tax return.

In addition to the term of prison imposed, Susantha Wijetunge was ordered to serve three years of supervised release, pay a fine of \$750,000 and pay \$562,500 in restitution to the IRS. In addition to the term of probation imposed, Manula Wijetunge was ordered to pay a fine of \$250,000 and \$208,125 in restitution to the IRS. The Wijetunges were ordered to forfeit \$4.1 million.

Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General Ciralo and U. S. Attorney Polite commended special agents of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations and IRS – Criminal Investigation, who conducted the investigation, and Assistant U.S. Attorneys Hayden Brockett and David Haller and Trial Attorney Michael Hatzimichalis of the Tax Division, who are prosecuting the case.

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