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VETERANS POST

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By Freddy Groves

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Money we'll never see again

What's going on up in New England? Did the thieves and scammers move up there thinking the VAOIG and DOJ wouldn't find them?

First we have a former VA medical staffer who was nailed for wire fraud. This thief applied for paycheck protection loans, claiming to own certain businesses. After being approved for loans, there was an additional claim that all the money went for payroll and a request for loan forgiveness, which was approved.

Then we have the pair of scammers who paid and received kickbacks for spinal implants and then attempted to obstruct a federal investigation into the fraud. Their physician consulting program was at the heart of the scheme, and it ended with two company higher-ups and five physicians being nailed for accepting sham consulting fees.

But it's the veteran who made so many false statements that is most disturbing. This veteran repeatedly claimed to the VA — and received disability money year after year — that he was unable to walk or stand and had to use a wheelchair due to an accident while he was in the Army.

Information surfaced, however, that helped to uncover the fraud, including photos and video of him walking, shopping and posting online about hunting.

Then, when he was about to be arrested for the fraud, he tried to fake his own death, bringing out all types of rescue people and agencies when he disappeared near the Canadian border. They determined that he wasn't really dead, despite how it looked.

He was finally grabbed by marshals, a year later, halfway across the country and was arrested on a federal warrant. Capturing him took the combined efforts of the VAOIG, Border Patrol, Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the National Guard drug task force, the Coast Guard, the Fraud Enforcement Division of the DOJ and more.

While he'll surely see prison time for the fraud, all that disability money he took from the VA over the years is gone. It's nearly a quarter of a million dollars the taxpayers will never get back.

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