

14,264 views | Nov 29, 2019, 4:33 pm

# U.S. Authorities Arrest Virgil Griffith For Teaching Cryptocurrency And Blockchain

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According to a press release from the Department of Justice on November 29, 2019, Virgil Griffith, resident of Singapore and U.S. citizen, was arrested for a criminal complaint where he was charged with violating, "...the International Emergency Economic Powers Act ("IEEPA") by traveling to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea ("DPRK" or "North Korea") in order deliver a presentation and technical advice on using cryptocurrency and blockchain technology to evade sanctions.



Virgil Griffith [LINKEDIN](#)

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**“Mr. Griffith allegedly traveled to North Korea without permission from the federal government, and with knowledge what he was doing was against the law. We cannot allow anyone to evade sanctions, because the consequences of North Korea obtaining funding, technology, and information to further its desire to build nuclear weapons put the world at risk. It’s even more egregious that a U.S. citizen allegedly chose to aid our adversary.”**

FBI Assistant Director-in-Charge William F. Sweeney Jr.

In this case, Griffith is specifically accused of traveling to North Korea (DPRK) in April 2019 to attend and present at the “Pyongyang Blockchain and Cryptocurrency Conference” (the “DPRK Cryptocurrency Conference”), even though the U.S. Department of State had denied Griffith permission to travel to the DPRK. Griffith presented at the DPRK Cryptocurrency Conference, knowing that doing so violated sanctions against the DPRK and at no time did Griffith obtain permission from OFAC to provide goods, services, or technology to the DPRK.

**“Despite receiving warnings not to go, Griffith allegedly traveled to one of the United States’ foremost adversaries, North Korea, where he taught his audience how to use blockchain technology to evade sanctions. By this complaint,**

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John Demers, Assistant Attorney General

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Griffith is specifically charged in connection with the IEEPA as a result of an Executive Order 13466 of June 26, 2008, “Continuing Certain Restrictions With Respect to North Korea and North Korean Nationals” and enforced under the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC). Most recently, Forbes reported on how Congress may enact a law with the Executive Order from Trump specific to Venezuela and the use of Petro cryptocurrency by U.S. citizens.

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In both cases, U.S. persons, in a dramatic twist of foreign policy and the ability of the U.S. to enforce sanctions in light of technological disruption, are held to account for actions that may help a country evade sanctions through the use of cryptocurrency and blockchain technology. With concerns over this latest incident resulting in an arrest, the Department of Justice appears to be signaling the level of concern law enforcement have with respect to the power of cryptocurrency and blockchain to disrupt the effectiveness of U.S. sanctions as a foreign policy tool.

**“Despite receiving warnings not to go, Griffith allegedly traveled to one of the United States’ foremost adversaries, North Korea, where he taught his audience how to use blockchain technology to evade sanctions. By this complaint, we begin the process of seeking justice for such conduct.”**

John Demers, Assistant Attorney General for National Security

In the press release – provided below – U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, Assistant Attorney General of National Security, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”) Counterintelligence Division, and the Assistant Director-in-Charge of the New York Field Office of the FBI jointly announced the arrest of Mr. Griffith. Griffith was arrested yesterday on Thanksgiving in Los Angeles National Airport and awaits disposition of his case before a judge today. The DOJ’s Terrorism and International Narcotics Unit will be handling the case.

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**Jason Brett**

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