January 6, 2004

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Mississippi Man Indicted for Attempted Extortion of $2.5 Million from Best Buy Co., Inc.

Minneapolis - A 25-year-old Mississippi man who allegedly attempted to extort $2.5 million from Best Buy Co., Inc. by threatening to expose purported flaws in the company's computer system is scheduled to appear today in U.S. District Court on federal extortion charges.

Thomas E. Ray, III, from Jackson, MS, was charged in an indictment returned by a federal grand jury on December 16, 2003 with two felony extortion charges: extortion-threats to damage property or reputation and extortion-threats to damage computers. Ray is scheduled for an arraignment today at 11:00 a.m. before U.S. Magistrate Judge J. Earl Cudd in Minneapolis.

According to the indictment, Ray, who used the e-mail name "Jamie Weathersby," used his e-mail to contact Best Buy in October 2003. Ray allegedly threatened to expose and exploit a purported computer security problem unless Best Buy paid him $2.5 million.

Security officials with Best Buy contacted federal authorities and worked with agents on the Minnesota CyberCrime Task Force during the federal investigation. Best Buy stated they found no proof that their customer data or customer accounts were compromised.

If convicted, Ray faces a maximum potential penalty of two years in prison and/or a $250,000 fine for extortion-threats to damage property or reputation and up to five years in prison and/or a $250,000 fine for extortion-threats to damage computers. Any sentence would be determined by a judge based on the federal sentencing guidelines.

The case is the result of an investigation by the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Best Buy, America On Line (AOL), and Netscape assisted the Minnesota CyberCrime Task Force in the investigation. Assistant United States Attorney Paul Luehr is prosecuting the case.

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