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Former Federal Prosecutor Defends Kohberger Plea Deal as Victory for Justice, Not Weakness

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The recent plea agreement in the University of Idaho student murder case has sparked debate, but a former federal prosecutor insists the focus should remain on the successful resolution and tireless investigative work behind it. Bryan Kohberger, now serving multiple life sentences, pleaded guilty in one of Idaho's most high-profile cases in recent memory.

According to former U.S. Attorney for Idaho Josh Hurwit, the outcome reflects a sound prosecutorial strategy, not leniency.

In an interview with the Idaho Statesman, Hurwit, who joined the prosecution team, spoke publicly for the first time since the court lifted its gag order. He stressed that from the outset, there was no certainty anyone would be held accountable for the shocking quadruple homicide in Moscow, Idaho. “Let’s not forget there was no guarantee at the outset that anyone would be held accountable,” Hurwit said. “And then to do it in a way that allowed successful prosecution, and it was a successful prosecution, because there were convictions that will not be appealed.”

Bryan Kohberger, 30, formally pleaded guilty to four counts of first-degree murder and one count of burglary in the November 2022 killings of four University of Idaho (U of I) student. Under the plea deal, he received four consecutive life sentences plus ten years, waived his right to appeal, and is ineligible for parole, avoiding the death penalty. The victims were seniors Madison Mogen and Kaylee Goncalves, both 21; junior Xana Kernodle, 20; and freshman Ethan Chapin, 20. The attack occurred in a rental home near campus, where the three female victims lived with two other roommates. Chapin was Kernodle’s boyfriend and had stayed overnight.

The case drew national attention, and while much of the conversation has centered around the plea deal, Hurwit emphasized the strength and discipline of the investigation. Kohberger’s arrest was the result of weeks of coordinated work involving local authorities and federal agencies. “It was the time required and needed to do the right type of investigation,” Hurwit said. “People were working, I know this literally around the clock.”

One key technique used was Investigative Genetic Genealogy (IGG) – a method involving DNA submitted to public ancestry databases to identify potential suspects. Hurwit acknowledged he was consulted on aspects of the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s (FBI) strategy but refrained from discussing specifics due to the sensitive nature of federal investigative methods. Kohberger was arrested on December 30, 2022, in eastern Pennsylvania, following a tip shared by the FBI with local authorities eleven days earlier. “As the investigation unfolded, I was aware of how things were progressing,” Hurwit said, underscoring the collaboration between federal and local law enforcement.

Hurwit had previously been appointed U.S. Attorney by President Joe Biden but stepped down earlier this year following the transition to the new administration. He agreed to join

the Kohberger prosecution team at the request of Latah County Prosecutor Bill Thompson, recognizing it as a chance to continue serving Idaho. “It was an opportunity to do work that was important for our state, and for that community,” he stated.

He also recalled the emotional toll the murders took on the small college town, especially in the early weeks when no suspect had been identified. Attending a university vigil in late November 2022, Hurwit described the atmosphere as “shocked,” “grieving,” and “uncertain.”

While Kohberger’s defense team has opted not to comment further, citing ethical obligations, Hurwit’s remarks serve as a reminder that justice is often achieved not in sweeping headlines but in meticulous, disciplined work, something this case has exemplified.