

# Now warning about Hunter Biden-laptop disinfo: The guy who leaked it



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When the New York Post first reported in October 2020 that it had obtained the contents of a laptop computer allegedly owned by Joe Biden's son Hunter, there was an immediate roadblock faced by any other news outlet that hoped to corroborate the reporting, as many did: The newspaper wasn't sharing what it obtained.

The national story quickly centered on the dubious provenance of the material, particularly given how, four years before, WikiLeaks had begun releasing material stolen by Russian hackers at about the same point in the presidential contest. But for news outlets interested in actually evaluating what the New York Post claimed it had, neither the paper nor its source for the material, President Donald Trump's attorney Rudy Giuliani, were willing to share. (Giuliani famously told the New York Times that he was hoping to *avoid* having the material vetted before being published.) It therefore seemed wise to treat the New York Post's claims with some skepticism.

Now, a new voice has joined those raising questions about the validity of the material that's alleged to have been on Hunter Biden's laptop: the guy who recovered that data in the first place.

Last month, The Washington Post was able to publish a report based on a copy of material that we obtained from a Republican activist named Jack Maxey who'd gotten it from Giuliani. We had multiple experts examine the contents of a hard drive that purported to contain the laptop's contents, validating tens of thousands of emails as likely to be legitimate. But an enormous amount of the material on the drive *couldn't* be validated as legitimate, in part because of the game of telephone that the material had undergone by the time it reached us. (The report notes that efforts to obtain the material in 2020 were rebuffed.)

“The experts found the data had been repeatedly accessed and copied by people other than Hunter Biden over nearly three years,” our report explained, with those we spoke with being unable to “reach definitive conclusions about the contents as a whole, including whether all of it originated from a single computer or could have been assembled from files from multiple computers and put on the portable drive.”

For example:

“[An expert] also found records on the drive that indicated someone may have accessed the drive from a West Coast location in October 2020, little more than a week after the first New York Post stories on Hunter Biden’s laptop appeared.”

“Over the next few days, somebody created three additional folders on the drive, titled, ‘Mail,’ ‘Salacious Pics Package’ and ‘Big Guy File’ — an apparent reference to Joe Biden.”

One expert likened it to a crime scene that was littered with fast-food wrappers thanks to the first police who’d arrived on the scene. That’s meant as an indictment, but it’s also generous. The first people on the scene weren’t police, in this case; they were (to extend the analogy) people aiming to obtain an indictment against a particular person.

There is still an unlittered crime scene out there. The owner of the store where Hunter Biden allegedly dropped the laptop off for repairs three years ago turned the computer over to the FBI when issued a subpoena to do so. In an interview with the right-wing media outlet “Real America’s Voice,” the owner, John Paul Mac Isaac, explained how relieved he was when the FBI came to get the laptop.

“I thought everything was great when they took it,” he said, “because that was what I wanted the whole time was just to get this stuff out of my shop, have the FBI — have a paper trail that afforded me some protection, both physically and legally.”

This was a theme of the interview, as it has been with past interviews with Mac Isaac: his insistences that he thought he was somehow in danger for having the laptop in his possession. If you’re wondering how he then was able to pass the material to Giuliani, the answer is that he nonetheless kept a copy of the material from the laptop “in case he was ever thrown under the bus as a result of what he knew,” his attorney told The Washington Post. In this particular tale, this is low on the scale of things that don’t entirely make sense.

It’s important to explain how Mac Isaac created the backup in the first place. The laptop he obtained repeatedly shut down as he tried to recover its data. So, instead of simply copying the entire hard drive to another device, he did so piecemeal, copying individual files and folders one at a time. In doing so, he claims that he saw material that he found alarming.

“I saw some content that was disturbing and then also raised some red flags,” Mac Isaac explained to “Real America’s Voice.” Later asked to explain what had alarmed him, he said that he saw “criminality ... related to foreign business dealings, to potential money laundering and, more importantly, national security issues and concerns.” That, he explained, was “what caused me to do a deep dive into the laptop once it became my property.”

Here, again, the timeline is iffy. Delaware law indicates that he could assume ownership of the laptop after a year. But he obtained the laptop in April 2019 (at the same time that conservative media was beginning to focus on Hunter Biden’s relationship with a Ukrainian energy company, Burisma) and gave it to the FBI that December. He said that he was alarmed by the failure of the laptop to come up during Trump’s first impeachment investigation. That effort ended in February 2020, before a year had passed.

What Mac Isaac said next, though, is what was most noteworthy. When he did his “deep dive,” he said, he “saw a lot of photos” — but “did not see a lot of photos that are being reported to [have been] seen.”

“I do know that there have been multiple attempts over the past year-and-a-half to insert questionable material into the laptop as in, not physically, but passing off this misinformation or disinformation as coming from the laptop,” he said. “And that is a major concern of mine because I have fought tooth and nail to protect the integrity of this drive and to jeopardize that is going to mean that everything that I sacrificed will be for nothing.”

In other words, Mac Isaac says that he has seen claims about what the laptop contains that don’t actually reflect what he saw on the laptop at the outset. Or, presumably, sees now, as one of the few people that might still have an unaltered copy of its contents.

To what is he referring? It’s hard to say. It may include one of the more popular claims that has circulated on the right, alleging that the machine included evidence of criminal sexual activity by Hunter Biden. (This was alleged on-air by Tucker Carlson last year, without proof.) Or it may involve other claims entirely.

Here’s where The Washington Post’s discovery that folders were added becomes more important. We have evidence that the portable hard drive had something added to it both before and after the New York Post’s original story — and here’s Mac Isaac agreeing that some of what he’s seen presented as coming from the laptop was never on there. This is why provenance matters in journalistic investigations. Just because Rudy Giuliani says that material came from a hard drive is not reason to assume it did — particularly when he’s on-record as disparaging the idea that the material should be vetted before being reported on.

Hunter Biden remains under federal investigation for possible violations of tax law. The material on the laptop (assuming that the laptop itself is Biden’s, which is also not entirely settled) may play a role in establishing his guilt or innocence. But the mythical *contents of the laptop* that have been so fascinating to the right for the past 18 months are — at least at times — not provably that.

If you don’t want to take the mainstream media’s word for it, take Mac Isaac’s.