Stephen Gore: 5 Fast Facts You Need to Know

By Janet Winikoff | Heavy | Published Aug. 1, 2019 at 9:45 a.m.

The FBI raided Stephen Gore's Biological Resource Center in January 2014. Agents discovered body parts in coolers and buckets and a woman's head sewn on to a man's body.

An FBI raid on an Arizona body donation company run by Stephen Douglas Gore, 52, discovered buckets filled with heads and sawed-off body parts, a cooler full of male genitals, and a woman's head sewn on to a man's torso as a "morbid joke," recently unsealed court documents revealed.

Gore received donated bodies from families who wanted their loved ones' remains to be used to find cures for diseases like cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's disease, and Parkinson's disease. But investigators uncovered evidence that Gore's Biological Resource Center (BRC) was selling bodies, body parts, and body tissues for military tests and to companies doing other types of medical experimentation.

Reuters reported that more than 5,000 bodies were donated to BRC. Body parts sold for several hundred dollars while a fully intact body cost just under $6,000. Body brokering is a legal but virtually unregulated business in the United States.

"This is a horror story. It's just unbelievable. This story is unbelievable," Troy Harp said. Harp donated his grandmother's body in 2012 and his mother's body in 2013. Harp said he was assured BRC would honor his family's wishes.

Gore is now at the center of a civil lawsuit filed by 33 plaintiffs who learned their loved ones' remains had not been used as promised for medical research. The case is set to go to court on October 21.

The lawsuit says that donors and their families specifically checked off a box on their consent form which read, "No, I do not authorize Biological Resource Center to use this bequest for such special non-medical projects."

Gore operated BRC from 2004 until the raid in 2014. The company was housed in a 9,000 square-foot building near the Phoenix Airport.

Here's what you need to know about Stephen Gore and the Biological Resource Center.

1. The Lawsuit Says Bodies Were Sold to the Department of Defense as "Crash Test Dummies"

According to court documents, Gore sold donated bodies to the Department of Defense for weapons testing. Jim Stauffer contacted BRC after his mother passed away from Alzheimer's disease and was assured by BRC that her body would be used for Alzheimer's research. Doris Stauffer's hand was removed, cremated, and returned to her family, while her body was sold to the U.S. Army to study damage done by roadside bombs.

Army officials told Reuters that BRC gave them heavily redacted consent forms and said they had permission to use the bodies for testing.

"These bodies were literally used as crash test dummies, which meant they were used in experiments involving exposures to destructive forces, e.g. impacts, crashes, ballistic injuries and blasts," the lawsuit states.

2. After the FBI Raid, Gore Released a Public Statement Saying the Public Might Make "Incorrect Conclusions"

After the 2014 FBI raid, Gore released a statement informing the public that he and his staff had cooperated fully with investigators and had answered questions without counsel. The former Florida insurance agent with no medical training said he had concerns the public might draw the wrong conclusions after the Attorney General issued a statement without providing details.

"As per the Attorney General's message to the public, little information has been made available. This lack of information has led many to speculate and to make incorrect conclusions," Gore's statement read.

3. The FBI Found 10 Tons of Frozen Remains

FBI agents who raided BRC collected a total of 10 tons of frozen human remains comprised of 1,755 total body parts. These included 281 heads, 241 shoulders, 337 legs, and 97 spines.

Former Phoenix FBI special agent Mark Cwynaragent saw the small woman's head attached to the large man's body in what he described as a "Frankenstein manner." There were also large male torsos missing limbs and genitalia, various heads and body parts in freezers, buckets, and coolers, and body parts piled up through the office with no tags or identification.

Agents who raided the facility noticed body fluids on the floor. Chainsaws and hacksaws had been used to dismember the bodies.

Gore received one year deferred jail time, four years probation and was ordered to pay $121,000 in restitution after pleading guilty in 2015 of illegal control of an enterprise.

"I could have been more open about the process of donation on the brochure we put in public view," Gore told AZ Central.

Gore's attorney, Clark Derrick, said his client always attempted to do right by his donors. "At some point, the business grew exponentially, we became shorthanded, we cut some corners, and for that I apologize and make amends," Derrick said on behalf of Gore.

4. Gore Was Tied to a Michigan Body Dealer Named Arthur Rathburn

Authorities linked BRC to former Detroit mortician Arthur Rathburn who was one of Gore's buyers. U.S. Customs agents caught Rathburn at the U.S./Canada border secretly carrying 10 human heads. One of the heads had been sold by BRC to Rathburn. FBI agents were eventually able to trace 250 body parts purchased by Rathburn back to Gore and BRC.

Rathburn bought bodies and body parts from Gore, then rented and sold them for medical training at conventions and seminars. He also secretly sold body parts from clients he'd been paid to cremate. An FBI agent was told by his employees that the families of the deceased who asked for the cremated remains to be returned sometimes "got something else."

In some cases, Rathburn knowingly rented and sold diseased body parts purchased from Gore without telling buyers they'd be exposed to contagious diseases.

Rathburn also used Delta cargo to ship body parts. Rathburn was convicted of fraud and shipping hazardous materials. He is serving nine years in federal prison. Federal prosecutor John Neal called Rathburn "deplorable."

5. Arizona's Attorney General has Called for Tighter Laws to Monitor Body Brokers

Arizona Attorney General Mark Brnovich has appealed to lawmakers and hopes they'll enact legislation that closely monitors "body broker" businesses.

"This is actually a growing industry in Arizona," Brnovich revealed, noting that the state has a large senior citizen population. "We want to make sure we are doing everything that we can," he said.

Brnovich expressed concern that this type of crime may become more commonplace without regulation. "I would call on policymakers to strengthen our laws because I think we're going to end up seeing more of these kind of cases, unfortunately, just based on our population."

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