

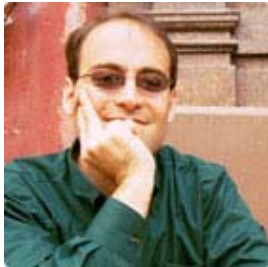


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Andy Carvin: [Internet activist, author, Edtech expert.](#)
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NOVEMBER 24, 2008

Case Closed for Julie Amero

BY ANDY CARVIN, 12:21 PM

Julie Amero, the substitute teacher subjected to a judicial roller coaster ride over whether she intentionally exposed a group of students to inappropriate computer images, ended her legal limbo by agreeing to a plea deal this Friday. It's the end of a long road for Amero, but was justice served?

It's been a long road indeed for Amero, whom I've been covering on this blog ever since she was convicted in January 2007 by a Connecticut jury on charges of exposing students to pornographic images while subbing in a classroom. According to prosecutors, Amero had intentionally displayed the images on a computer, willfully disregarding her responsibility to protect her students. Unfortunately, no one bothered to examine the hard drive or get a computer security expert to testify during the trial. A group of experts who conducted their own investigation after the trial concluded she was a victim of malware – software that covertly made its way onto the computer without her knowledge to wreak havoc on the machine. And the security tools the school used to protect against such attacks just happened to be down at the time of Amero's stint in the classroom. Nonetheless, she was convicted and faced jail time.

In June of 2007, the evidence collected by the security experts supporting the malware scenario was so strong that a judge decided to set aside Amero's conviction. That could have been the end of the matter, but prosecutors decided they would

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continue to press for another trial. Now, almost 18 months later, Amero and prosecutors have reached a deal to settle the matter. Prosecutors agreed to drop all felony charges against her; in return, Amero pled guilty to a misdemeanor charge of obstruction of justice, paid a \$100 fine and surrendered her teaching license.

“Oh honey, it’s over. I feel wonderful,” Amero, 41, said a few minutes after accepting the deal, according to Hartford Courant columnist [Rick Green](#). “The Norwich police made a mistake. It was proven. That makes me feel like I’m on top of the world.” Meanwhile, according to Green, prosecutors stand by their original position that Amero was guilty. “I have no regrets,” prosecutor Michael Regan told him. “Things took a course that was unplanned. Unfortunately the computer wasn’t examined properly by the Norwich police.... For some reason this case caught the media’s attention,” Regan said. Like Amero said, the case is indeed over. But this doesn’t change the fact that the whole matter has been a series of failures. Failure by the school to keep its security filters functioning. Failure by the district to ensure that all teachers, including substitute teachers have the computer literacy to respond to the problem. Failure by the police and prosecutors to conduct a proper forensic investigation of the computer itself. And because of these failures, a teacher will never be able to step foot in the classroom again. It’s closure for Julie Amero, but is it justice? -andy

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Responses

I find this really depressing. Thanks for the update though. I was wondering what had happened.

By [Eva](#) 1:16 PM on 24 Nov 08

Thank you for covering this incident. It stinks, though. It’s very depressing that this woman lost her teaching license and had to endure this legal

nightmare over something she did not cause and had no preparation for dealing with.

By [Lynne](#) 9:00PM on 24 Nov 08

If Joe the Plumber chose a tool he was unfamiliar with to fix your toilet (causing serious water damage), should he forfeit his license? (Or be held liable?)

By [craig](#) 10:19AM on 25 Nov 08

I am very disappointed in this decision. This was a one time incident and for this to drag on in the courts and waste the taxpayers money is disgusting. If a student was caught looking at the images they would be given a slap on the wrist claiming they didn't know it was wrong. This was a sub who probably didn't know the school very well and was not surfing the web and showing this to students. Maybe their technology people or tech director should be charged for not protecting the students with active and updated software

By [Anthony](#) 10:53AM on 25 Nov 08

FYI— The “real” Joe the Plumber is unlicensed.

By [Jim](#) 10:00PM on 25 Nov 08

Why would she be able to continue teaching? Something like this should not be tolerated. If there was any doubt what she had on her computer, why would she be using it? Does the school not supply the computer? Why was she using her personal computer? I'm a little curious to how this happened.

By [John](#) 7:15PM on 26 Nov 08

“Why would she be able to continue teaching? Something like this should not be tolerated. If there was any doubt what she had on her computer, why would she be using it? Does the school not supply the computer? Why was she using her personal computer? I'm a little curious to how this happened.”

Spyware will get to you doesn't matter which computer you are using. It's clearly show that she

had no intention of accessing those website.

This should be a message to everyone to install Anti-Spyware/Virus application and set it to automatically scan and update the definition file.

There are FREE Anti-Spyware/Virus application for personal used.

<http://free.avg.com>

<http://www.malwarebytes.org/mbam.php>

Both provide “cheap” commercial version.

Counterspy cost \$19.99 per year

<http://www.sunbeltsoftware.com/Home-Home-Office/Anti-Spyware/>

By james 12:04AM on 27 Nov 08

I am only now learning of this case. What I glean from the story is the determination of the prosecutor to “nail” the defendant by bring in the new charge of obstruction. This is to say, “I got you!”

By Francis 1:04PM on 30 Nov 08

Spyware on a filtered school network? I have never heard of that. Is that possible and how does it work?

By John 3:50PM on 02 Dec 08

Hi John,

The filters were off that week. They were shut down for some reason and she apparently wasn't notified.

By Andy Carvin 3:53PM on 02 Dec 08

I was easily able to access sites through my firewall at school using a proxy. Surfs up baby!

By Raven Lee 5:06PM on 03 Dec 08

John-

While teaching in NYC (which has pretty stringent filters) I was in the computer lab, checking links on a webquest (luckily, by myself, not with a class). I clicked a link for an arts organization that had previously taken me to their (totally inoffensive) homepage. My computer was inundated by one

pornographic site after another. I had to manually shut down the computer to get it to stop. After speaking to a colleague who happened to know the leaders of the organization, I discovered that a disgruntled former employee had “hijacked” their web address and they were in the process of trying to fix the problem.

I’m pretty computer savvy. My district had strict filters that were working at the time. Yet some pretty foul stuff appeared on my screen that day. So, yeah, stuff like this does happen through no fault of the teacher.

By Cindy 7:55AM on 05 Dec 08

I’ve only just been reading about this case, and I am appalled that U.S. justice system is able to ruin a persons career and impose a fine fine as a justification for bringing this case. Even if she had shown a bunch of 13 year olds porn, 40 YEARS! 40 YEARS in prison for showing sexual images. I discover my old man’s Playboy stash at that age, would he serve time for that these days? What is it with the U.S. and sex? What drives this fear of sex but love of violence? Janet Jackson’s tit causes outrage yet half of the crime drama’s are explicit in their violence and graphic imagery..... I don’t get it.

By Joe 8:14AM on 31 Dec 08

“Why would she be able to continue teaching? Something like this should not be tolerated. If there was any doubt what she had on her computer, why would she be using it? Does the school not supply the computer? Why was she using her personal computer? I’m a little curious to how this happened.”

I’d suggest searching Google and reading a few of the more recent articles discussing this case.

This did not happen on her personal computer, this happened on the computer in the classroom she was subbing in. The virus protection installed on that computer became obsolete the previous Spring and prior to this happening, the computer became infected with spyware.

The real people at fault in this case, was an IT administrator that didn't know how to do his job, the police that didn't know enough about computer vulnerabilities, an overzealous prosecution and an excessive amount of "cover your own a#\$" within the school administration when this became public.

Millions of people out there know as little or less than Julie Amero about how their computers or how the internet operates, much less how to deal with Malware and viruses.

By Tim Rule 4:21 PM on 05 Jan 09

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