



NEWS RELEASE

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09-034

FEDERAL COURT SENTENCES COUSINS FOR MAILING ALCOHOL TO GAMBELL

Anchorage, Alaska – United States Attorney Karen L. Loeffler announced that on March 23, 2009, James Walunga of Gambell, Alaska, and Willis Walunga of Anchorage, were sentenced in federal court in Anchorage to three years of probation for their convictions of conspiracy to mail intoxicating liquors.

United States Magistrate Judge John D. Roberts imposed the sentence on James Walunga, age 29, and Willis Walunga, age 35.

According to information presented to the court by Assistant United States Attorney Bryan Schroder, who prosecuted the case, Willis and James Walunga, who are cousins, conspired to purchase alcohol and ship it to Gambell for sale. Gambell is a dry local option community that bans the sale and importation of alcoholic beverages. Willis Walunga purchased six bottles of alcohol in Anchorage, packaged it, and mailed it to James Walunga in Gambell. As part of the shipping, Willis Walunga certified that the packages did not contain alcohol. Postal authorities later discovered the contents of the package when it broke open during shipping.

Prior to imposing sentence, Magistrate Judge Roberts recognized the right of local communities to exclude alcohol, and determined that both men must be held accountable for their poor decisions. As a special condition of probation, Magistrate Judge Roberts ordered each man to undergo a substance abuse evaluation, and if called for, participate in substance abuse treatment.

Ms. Loeffler commended the U.S. Postal Inspection Service for the investigation leading to the successful prosecution of James and Willis Walunga.

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