

For Immediate Release
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**84 DEFENDANTS CHARGED WITH DRUG TRAFFICKING OFFENSES AS
A RESULT OF DEA "MET" OPERATION IN ROSWELL, NEW MEXICO**

ALBUQUERQUE – United States Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales and Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Special Agent in Charge Joseph M. Arabit announced that 57 Roswell residents have been charged with federal drug trafficking offenses in 45 federal indictments and six federal criminal complaints that were unsealed yesterday. Another 27 Roswell residents have been charged with state drug trafficking offenses in state criminal complaints, and are being prosecuted by Janetta B. Hicks, District Attorney for the 5th Judicial District of the State of New Mexico.

The charges against the 84 defendants are the result of an intensive three-month long investigation led by a Mobile Enforcement Team (MET) from the DEA's El Paso Division Office in conjunction with Chaves County Metro Narcotics HIDTA Task Force. Most of the 84 defendants were arrested yesterday in a massive law enforcement operation involving more than a hundred and fifty federal, state and local law enforcement officers. Officers also executed six federal search warrants at five residences and one business in Roswell during yesterday's operation.

As of early this morning, 49 of the 57 federal defendants and 17 of the 27 state defendants were in custody. Eight federal defendants and ten state defendants have yet to be arrested and are considered fugitives. Many of the defendants are charged with distributing methamphetamine. Others are charged with distributing cocaine, heroin, marijuana and prescription drugs. The defendants made their initial court appearances in Roswell yesterday. The federal defendants remain in custody pending detention hearings that will be held in federal

court in Las Cruces next week.

The DEA's MET program was created in 1995 in response to violent drug-trafficking organizations in towns and cities across the nation. MET teams are deployed on a temporary basis to assist state, local, and tribal law enforcement in the disruption or dismantlement of violent drug trafficking. There have been fourteen MET deployments in New Mexico since the inception of the program. The MET deployment in Roswell was initiated based on a request from U.S. Attorney Gonzales and the Roswell Police Department to address a surge in violent criminal street gang activity directly associated with drug trafficking in Chaves County.

During the MET's three-month investigation, agents made approximately 60 undercover drug buys and executed four federal search warrants in addition to the search warrants that were executed yesterday. In addition, the agents seized 14 firearms, including four AK-47 rifles, four AR-15 rifles, and six semi-automatic handguns, during the investigation. Prior to yesterday's operation, 2446 gross grams of methamphetamine, 861 gross grams of cocaine, 338 gross grams of heroin, 133 gross grams of marijuana and pharmaceutical narcotics were obtained through undercover drug purchases and seizures. During yesterday's operation, agents seized an additional five firearms including a shotgun, five vehicles, and quantities of methamphetamine, cocaine, heroin, marijuana and pharmaceutical narcotics.

In announcing yesterday's arrests, U.S. Attorney Gonzales commended the cooperative efforts of federal, state and local law enforcement, and said: "Earlier this year, community leaders in Roswell asked my Office to work with them in tackling the escalating drug trafficking and gang related violence in Chaves County. We immediately agreed, and enlisted the help of our federal law enforcement partners, like Mr. Arabit and the DEA. Together, we embarked on a coordinated effort to crackdown on drug trafficking and gang violence in Chaves County, and to

help bring about positive change for the people who live there. Although yesterday's law enforcement operation was part of our response to Roswell's request for help, it is also part of our statewide fight against drugs and the cycle of violence that goes hand in hand with drug trafficking. The federal law enforcement community remains committed to working with Ms. Hicks, Police Chief Al Solis, Sheriff Rob Coon as well as other state and local officials to safeguard families throughout New Mexico."

"Drug abuse and related criminal activity can have particularly devastating effects in our communities and rural areas," said DEA Special Agent in Charge Arabit. "By combining our resources and expertise to investigate, arrest, and prosecute those responsible for dealing illegal drugs in Roswell and southeastern New Mexico, DEA and our state and local law enforcement partners are working to reduce overall crime and improve the quality of life for area residents. The arrests in this operation are a positive step in that direction."

District Attorney Hicks said, "The DEA and Chaves County Metro Narcotics Task Force should be commended for all of their hard work in this investigation. The District Attorney's Office is pleased to work closely with the United States Attorney's Office in aggressively pursuing these cases. We are all working together to make the citizens of Chaves County safer."

Agents and officers from the following law enforcement agencies supported the DEA MET and Chaves County Metro Narcotics HIDTA Task Force during yesterday's law enforcement operation: the Roswell Police Department, the Chaves County Sheriff's Office, the Lea County Region VI Task Force, the Carlsbad Police Department, the Eddy County Sheriff's Office, the Pecos Valley Task Force, the New Mexico State Police, the United States Marshal's Service, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, U.S. Homeland Security Investigations, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and U.S.

Border Patrol.

The federal cases are being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorneys Terri Abernathy, John Crews, Sarah Davenport, Amanda Gould, Jessica Jarvis, Ron Jennings, Aaron Jordan, Nathan Lichvarcik, Marisa Lizarraga, Donald Moore, Michael Nammar, Michael PleTERS, Ravi Sinha and Jacob Wishard. The state cases are being prosecuted by Assistant District Attorneys Donald Moore and Matthew Stone.

Charges in indictments and criminal complaints are only accusations. All criminal defendants are presumed innocent until proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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