



PRESS RELEASE

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**FEDERAL INVESTIGATION DISMANTLES MARIJUANA AND COCAINE PIPELINE
BETWEEN MEXICO AND STATES IN THE SOUTHWEST, MIDWEST AND SOUTH**

ALBUQUERQUE – Twenty individuals, who allegedly participated in conspiracies to distribute marijuana and cocaine from Mexico in New Mexico, Colorado, Wisconsin, Indiana, Iowa, Minnesota and Tennessee, and to launder drug proceeds, are charged with drug trafficking and money laundering charges in two federal indictments that were unsealed earlier today by the U.S. District Court for the District of New Mexico.

The two indictments were announced by U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales, Joseph M. Arabit, Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration's El Paso Field Division, Dawn Mertz, Special Agent in Charge of the Phoenix Field Office of the Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation, and Scott A. Luck, Chief Patrol Agent of the El Paso Sector of the U.S. Border Patrol.

One indictment charges 16 defendants with conspiracy to distribute marijuana and cocaine between Jan. 2012 and Sept. 2012. Six of the defendants also are charged with conspiracy to launder drug proceeds during that same period. The indictment, which also includes 29 other drug trafficking and money laundering charges, alleges that members of the conspiracy used pickup trucks to transport bulk quantities of marijuana and quantities of cocaine from Mexico to New Mexico, Colorado, Wisconsin, Indiana and Iowa. It also alleges that acts in furtherance of the money laundering conspiracy occurred in New Mexico, Colorado, Iowa and Minnesota. The 31-count indictment also seeks forfeiture of property and proceeds derived from or involved in the defendants' illegal activities.

The second indictment charges six defendants, including two who also are charged in the 16-defendant indictment, with conspiracy to distribute marijuana and cocaine between May 2012 and Sep. 2012. The indictment, which also includes 26 other drug trafficking, money laundering, cash smuggling charges and immigration charges, alleges that the members of the conspiracy transported bulk quantities of marijuana and quantities of cocaine from Mexico to New Mexico, Colorado, Minnesota and Tennessee. The 27-count indictment also seeks forfeiture of property and proceeds derived from or involved in the defendants' illegal activities.

The two indictments, which were filed under seal on Sept. 20, 2012, are the result of “Operation Short Final,” a multi-agency investigation spearheaded by the DEA which was designated as part of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (“OCDETF”) program. OCDETF is a nationwide Department of Justice program that combines the resources and unique expertise of federal agencies, along with their local counterparts, in a coordinated effort to disrupt and dismantle major drug trafficking organizations. Operation Short Final was undertaken in conjunction with two other DEA-led OCDETF investigations: “Operation Final Chapter” in the Eastern District of Wisconsin and “Operation Fly Swatter” in the District of Colorado.

This morning, federal, state and local law enforcement officers executed a coordinated series of law enforcement operations that resulted in the arrests of 18 of the 20 defendants charged in the two New Mexico indictments. They also executed search warrants at three residences in Las Cruces, N.M., one search warrant at a residence in Denver, Colo., and one search warrant in residence in Midland, Texas. Six defendants were arrested in Las Cruces; four in Denver; two in El Paso, Texas; and one each in Santa Fe, N.M., Midland, Texas, Salt Lake City, Utah, Racine, Wis., and Oklahoma City, Okla. Another defendant, who is in state custody in Texas, will be transferred to New Mexico. Two defendants have yet to be apprehended and are considered fugitives.

The defendants arrested in Las Cruces and El Paso will make their initial appearances in Las Cruces federal court tomorrow morning, and the defendant arrested in Santa Fe will make his initial appearance in Albuquerque federal court tomorrow morning. The defendants arrested elsewhere will be transferred to Las Cruces federal court to face the charges in the indictments.

Operation Short Final was initiated in March 2012, after the DEA in Milwaukee learned that suspected marijuana traffickers from Racine, Wis., had relocated to Las Cruces. During the course of the investigation, law enforcement officers seized approximately 630 pounds of marijuana and \$108,980 in cash. During today’s law enforcement operations, officers seized ten firearms, 11 vehicles and two jet skis. They also seized tools for disassembling hidden compartments in vehicles.

U.S. Attorney Gonzales commended the investigative work that resulted in the two indictments and said, “Today’s arrests shutdown off a significant pipeline used by Mexican drug traffickers and their U.S. based confederates to distribute drugs throughout the United States, and then funnel the proceeds from drug sales back to Mexico. Our success in shutting down this operation was the result of rock-solid partnerships among federal, state and local law enforcement. Together, we will continue to disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking organizations that threaten our communities both here in New Mexico and throughout the United States.”

Today, DEA and our federal, state and local law enforcement partners have disrupted a significant drug transportation and money laundering organization operating in Southern New Mexico with links to Mexico, Texas, Colorado and states in the Midwest,” said DEA Special

Agent in Charge Arabit. “The arrests and seizures in this case are part of our combined, ongoing efforts to disrupt supply chains of drugs before they can be dealt on the streets in our communities.”

“This is yet another example of multiple agencies working together to tackle and dismantle a sophisticated drug trafficking organization. Special Agents with IRS-CI have the knowledge and expertise necessary to understand and unravel a variety of complex financial transactions,” said IRS Special Agent in Charge Mertz.

Chief Patrol Agent Luck added, “The dismantling of a transnational criminal organization at the hands of a multi-agency collaboration of law enforcement is an outstanding highlight of the daily work that Police Officers, Sheriff’s Deputies and Federal Agents do in an effort to bring safety and security to the communities that we serve and live within.”

These two cases are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Andrea Hattan, and were investigated by DEA, IRS-Criminal Investigation, and the U.S. Border Patrol, with assistance from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, Homeland Security Investigations, the U.S. Marshals Service, and the Doña Ana County Sheriff’s Department. Numerous local, state and federal agencies in Colorado, Wisconsin, Colorado, Texas, Utah and Oklahoma assisted during the course of the investigation and in today’s law enforcement operations.

United States v. Dominguez-Lopez, et al. – Summary of Charges

Count 1 of the indictment charges all 16 defendants with conspiracy to distribute marijuana and cocaine. A conviction on this count carries a maximum penalty of not less than five years and not more than 40 years of imprisonment and a \$5 million fine.

Count 2 of the indictment charges six of the defendants with conspiracy to launder money. A conviction on this count carries a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment and a \$500,000 fine.

Counts 3, 4, 20 and 21 each charge certain defendants with money laundering. A conviction on each of these counts carries a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment and a \$500,000 fine.

Count 5 through 19, 22 through 28 and 30 charge certain defendants with using communication devices to further the commission of drug trafficking crimes. A conviction on any one of these counts carries a maximum penalty of four years of imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

Counts 29 and 31 each charge certain defendants with possession of marijuana with intent to distribute. A conviction on Count 29 carries a maximum penalty of five years of

imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine, and a conviction on Count 31 carries a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment and a \$1 million fine.

United States v. Dominguez-Lopez, et al. – Defendants

Eidolfo Dominguez-Lopez, 32, a naturalized U.S. citizen, of Las Cruces, N.M., is charged in Counts 1, 2, 13, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 26, 27 and 30 of the indictment. Dominguez-Lopez was arrested in Las Cruces.

Leonel Molinar, Jr., 22, of Denver, Colo., is charged in Counts 1, 2, 8, 10, 17, 19, 21, 24 through 28, and 30 of the indictment. Molinar was arrested in Denver.

David Garcia, Jr., 29, of Las Cruces, N.M., is charged in Counts 1 through 15, 19 and 20 of the indictment. Garcia was arrested in Las Cruces.

Gilbert Hinojosa, 31, of Las Cruces, N.M., is charged in Counts 1, 5, 6 and 7 of the indictment. Garcia was arrested in Denver.

Adrian Ordonez, 22, of Denver, Colo., is charged in Counts 1, 5 and 25 of the indictment. Ordonez was arrested in Denver.

Luis Joaquin Maldonado-Rodriguez, 35, of Chihuahua, Mexico, is charged in Counts 1 and 22 of the indictment. Maldonado-Rodriguez has yet to be apprehended and is considered a fugitive.

Gustavo Alcantar-Avitia, 21, of Denver, Colo., is charged in Counts 1, 2, 11, 12 and 15 of the indictment. Alcantar-Avitia was arrested in Denver.

Cristobal Estrada Ortiz, 55, a Mexican national who is a legal permanent resident, is charged in Counts 1 and 2 of the indictment. Estrada Ortiz was arrested in Oklahoma City, Okla.

Carlos Alberto Luis Calderon, 27, a Mexican national who is a legal permanent resident and resides in Hatch, N.M., is charged in Counts 1 and 14 of the indictment. Calderon was arrested in Racine, Wis.

Martha Denise Gomez, 26, of Las Cruces, N.M., is charged in Counts 1 through 4 of the indictment. Gomez was arrested in Las Cruces.

Barbara Erica Rascon-Pena, 33, of El Paso, Texas, is charged in Count 1 of the indictment. Rascon-Pena was arrested in El Paso.

Giselle Liset Aragon, 24, of El Paso, Texas, is charged in Count 1 of the indictment. Aragon was arrested in El Paso.

Omar Macias, 39, a Mexican national who is a legal permanent resident and resides in Las Cruces, N.M., is charged in Counts 1 and 9 of the indictment. Macias is in state custody in Texas and will be transferred to New Mexico.

Michelle Marquez, 22, of Las Cruces, N.M., is charged in Counts 1 and 29 of the indictment. Marquez was arrested in Las Cruces.

Mauricio Chaparro, 26, of Las Cruces, N.M., is charged in Counts 1 and 29 of the indictment. Chaparro was arrested in Las Cruces.

Jesus Manuel Veleta-Gastelum, 56, of a Mexican national who is a legal permanent resident who resides in Santa Fe, N.M., is charged in Counts 1 and 31 of the indictment. Veleta-Gastelum was arrested in Las Cruces.

United States v. Alcantar-Avitia, et al. – Summary of Charges

Count 1 of the indictment charges six defendants with conspiracy to distribute marijuana and cocaine. A conviction on this count carries a maximum penalty of not less than five years and not more than 40 years of imprisonment and a \$5 million fine.

Counts 2 through 15, 18 through 24, and 26 each charge certain defendants with using communication devices to further the commission of drug trafficking crimes. A conviction on any one of these counts carries a maximum penalty of four years of imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

Counts 16 and 17 each charge certain defendants with money laundering. A conviction on each of these counts carries a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment and a \$500,000 fine.

Count 25 charges certain defendants with smuggling bulk cash out of the United States. A conviction on this count carries a maximum penalty of five years of imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

Count 27 charges a defendant with re-entering the United States without authority after previously having been deported. A conviction on this count carries a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

United States v. Alcantar-Avitia, et al. – Defendants

Gustavo Alcantar-Avitia, 21, of Denver, Colo., is charged in Counts 1 through 26 of the indictment. Alcantar-Avitia was arrested in Denver. Alcantar-Avitia also is charged in the Dominguez-Lopez indictment.

Miguel Reyes, 19, of Midland, Texas, is charged in Counts 1 through 4, 6, 16 and 17 of the indictment. Reyes was arrested in Midland.

Victor Lucero, 27, of Salt Lake City, Utah, is charged in Count 1 of the indictment. Lucero was arrested in Salt Lake City.

Lazaro Mendoza-Dominguez, 41, a Mexican national who resides in Santa Fe, N.M., is charged in Counts 1, 10 and 12 of the indictment. Mendoza-Dominguez was arrested in Santa Fe.

David Garcia, Jr., 29, of Las Cruces, N.M., is charged in Counts 1, 7, 14 and 15 of the indictment. Garcia was arrested in Las Cruces. Garcia also is charged in the Dominguez-Lopez indictment.

Alberto Loya-Nevarez, 36, of Namiquipa, Mexico, is charged in Counts 1, 18 through 25, and 27 of the indictment. Loya-Nevarez has yet to be apprehended and is considered a fugitive.

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

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