



PRESS RELEASE

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**FEDERAL JURY CONVICTS NEVADA WOMAN ON
COCAINE TRAFFICKING OFFENSE**

ALBUQUERQUE – Earlier today, a federal jury sitting in Albuquerque, N.M., found Estrella Celeste Lopez-Velasquez, 29, of Las Vegas, Nev., guilty of a cocaine trafficking offense after a three-day trial, announced U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales.

Lopez-Velasquez was arrested on March 26, 2012, after a DEA agent found more than a kilogram of cocaine in her baggage while conducting an interdiction operation at the Amtrak train station in Albuquerque. On April 10, 2012, Lopez-Velasquez was indicted and charged with possession of cocaine with intent to distribute.

The evidence at trial established that, on March 26, 2012, a DEA agent, who was conducting an interdiction operation at the Amtrak train station, approached Lopez-Velasquez, who was traveling on a train bound for Chicago, Ill. After identifying himself as a law enforcement officer and displaying badge, the DEA agent asked Lopez-Velasquez if she had any baggage. Lopez-Velasquez responded by identifying a duffle bag in the overhead luggage compartment as her baggage. After obtaining her permission to search the duffle bag, the DEA agent searched the bag and found a pillow which contained a brick-like bundle that appeared to contain a controlled substance. Subsequent laboratory tests revealed that the substance in the pillow was cocaine.

The DEA agent testified that, after he arrested Lopez-Velasquez, she admitted that a friend gave her the pillow the day before and was paying her \$2000 to make a “trip” from Las Vegas to Chicago. Lopez-Velasquez also claimed that she believed the pillow contained money and not narcotics.

Lopez-Velasquez testified in her own defense, and claimed that, unbeknownst to her, a friend surreptitiously slipped the pillow into her duffle bag. Lopez-Velasquez also testified that she did not know that the pillow contained cocaine.

The jury deliberated approximately two and a half hours before returning a guilty verdict.

At sentencing, Lopez-Velasquez faces a mandatory minimum five years and a maximum of 40 years of imprisonment. Lopez-Velasquez was remanded into the custody of the U.S. Marshals Service after the jury returned the guilty verdict. She will be detained pending her sentencing hearing, which has yet to be scheduled.

The case was investigated by the DEA's Interdiction Unit, and is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Norman Cairns and David M. Walsh.

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