

# Department of Justice



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## **MAJOR STRAW PURCHASERS IN ARIZONA FIREARMS TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATION SENTENCED**

PHOENIX, AZ– Sean Christopher Steward and Jacob Anthony Montelongo both of Phoenix, Arizona, were sentenced to serve 108 months and 41 months, respectively, in federal custody by the Honorable James A. Teilborg, United States District Judge, after entering guilty pleas to federal firearms trafficking charges, United States Attorney for the Southern District of California Laura E. Duffy announced today. The charges arise from the defendants' participation in a Phoenix-based firearms trafficking organization, which was illegally acquiring firearms in Arizona for shipment, transportation and/or exportation to drug trafficking organizations in the United States and Mexico.

On July 18, 2012, Steward tendered guilty pleas to Counts 1 and 38 of the indictment charging him with: Count 1 – conspiracy to deal in firearms without a license, make false statements in connection with the acquisition of a firearm, and smuggle goods from the United States, all in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 371; and Count 38 – the making of false statements in connection with the December 24, 2009, straw purchase of forty (40) AK-47 style rifles, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 924(a)(1)(A).

On January 23, 2012, Montelongo tendered guilty pleas to counts 1 and 2 of the indictment charging him with conspiracy to deal in firearms without a license, make false statements in connection with the acquisition of a firearm, and smuggling goods from the United States, all in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 371; and with willfully engaging in the business of dealing in firearms without a license, in violation of Title 18, United States Code, Section 922(a)(1)(A).

According to court records, Steward and Montelongo were two of the most prolific straw purchasers in the Phoenix-based firearms trafficking conspiracy. During a six-month period from December 2009 through June 2010, Steward, using funds provided by the leader of the firearms trafficking organization, paid over \$176,000 in cash to purchase approximately 289 firearms, including two-hundred and sixty (260) AK-47 style firearms, twenty (20) nine millimeter pistols, five (5) 5.7 caliber pistols and a .50 caliber rifle – all “weapons of choice” of the Mexican drug cartels. Steward was recruited by one of the leaders of the firearms trafficking organization to act

as a straw purchaser of firearms. During the course of his involvement in the conspiracy, he not only acted as a straw purchaser, but he also transported and delivered firearms to other members of the conspiracy for ultimate delivery to individuals associated with Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

According to court records, Montelongo personally purchased and assisted in the straw purchase of 109 firearms, including multiple AK-47 style rifles and six .50 caliber rifles.

In imposing the sentences, Judge Teilborg applied sentencing enhancements for Steward's and Montelongo's aggravating criminal conduct, which included enhancements for: (1) the number of weapons purchased; (2) trafficking in firearms; and (3) other felony offenses, that is, the illegal transportation and smuggling of firearms and the facilitation of drug trafficking crimes. In sentencing Steward, Judge Teilborg also applied an upwards sentencing departure based on Steward's criminal conduct in purchasing and trafficking in a number of substantial military assault-type rifles.

United States Attorney Duffy noted that "the defendants were responsible for purchasing an arsenal of weapons, including over 200 military assault-type rifles, for the firearms trafficking organization. They did so knowing that the firearms were to be smuggled to Mexico, where they would be used to fuel the ongoing violence. The sentences reflect the aggravating nature of their involvement in the conspiracy as prolific straw purchasers and their reckless disregard for the safety of citizens in both the U.S. and Mexico who reside in our border communities."

This case is being investigated by agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Internal Revenue Service-Criminal Investigation, in Arizona and prosecuted in the Southern District of California by Assistant United States Attorneys Shane P. Harrigan, Timothy Coughlin and Mark Conover.

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