



**U.S. Department of Justice  
U.S. Attorney's Office  
Western District of Texas**

**Robert Pitman, U.S. Attorney**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

[www.usdoj.gov/usao/twx/index.html](http://www.usdoj.gov/usao/twx/index.html)

Contact: Daryl Fields  
Public Information Officer  
(210) 384-7440

June 14, 2012

**FORMER COLUMBUS, NEW MEXICO MAYOR SENTENCED TO FEDERAL PRISON  
IN FEDERAL FIREARMS TRAFFICKING CASE**

**United States Attorney Robert Pitman** that 52-year-old Eddie Espinoza, former Village of Columbus (NM) mayor, was sentenced to 51 months in federal prison in connection with a firearms straw purchasing and trafficking operation.

In addition to the prison term, United States District Judge Robert C. Brack ordered that he be placed under supervised release for a period of three years after completing his prison term.

In July 2011, Espinoza pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy, three counts of making false statements in the acquisition of firearms and three counts of smuggling firearms from the United States. By pleading guilty, Espinoza admitted that from January 2010 to March 2011, he conspired with others in a firearms straw purchasing and trafficking operation. During today's sentencing hearing, it was revealed that Espinoza purchased a total 16 firearms from Chaparral Guns in Chaparral, NM, and while doing so, falsely stated on ATF Form 4473's that he was the actual purchaser of the firearms, when in fact, he knew that the purchased firearms were illegally destined to people in Mexico. Also revealed during today's hearing was that as part of the conspiracy, Espinoza had agreed to allow former Village of Columbus Trustee Blas Gutierrez and others to use city-owned vehicles to transport straw-purchased firearms to Mexico.

Espinoza is the fourth of 12 convicted defendants to be sentenced in this case. No other sentencing dates have been scheduled.

The investigation was conducted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF), ICE Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) with assistance from the Comandante Chihuahua State Police in Palomas, Mexico and the Secretariat of Public Security in Juarez, Mexico. The U.S. Marshal's Service, U.S. Border Patrol, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, New Mexico State Police, Las Cruces Police Department, El Paso Police Department as well as other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies also provided assistance during the investigation. The case is being prosecuted by District of New Mexico Assistant United States Attorney Nathan Lichvarcik as well as Western District of Texas Assistant United States Attorneys Greg McDonald and Steve Spitzer.

#####