

Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
JULY 29, 2011
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MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO ARSON AT DMV OFFICE

BUFFALO, N.Y.--The United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of New York announced today that Robert M. Vernon, 59, formerly of Fairfield Heights, State of New South Wales, Australia, pleaded guilty, before Chief U.S. District Court Judge William M. Skretny, to the crime of commanding, inducing and procuring others to damage and destroy a building by means of fire. The charge carries a minimum penalty of five years in prison, a maximum of 20, a \$250,000.00 fine, or both.

According to Assistant U.S. Attorney Richard P. Maigret, Vernon had a dispute with a Department of Motor Vehicles ("DMV") Automotive Facilities Inspector involving his used car businesses, Econo Motors and Variety Motors. On December 22, 2006, Vernon offered to pay an individual \$1,000.00 to set fire to a portion of a DMV building, located at 334 Dingens Street, Buffalo, which he believed contained the Inspector's files. Also on December 22, 2006, the defendant drove this individual past the DMV building and pointed out the area of the building that he wanted burned. That individual contacted another individual who, in turn, threw a Molotov cocktail into the building late in the evening on December 24, 2006. The resulting fire caused over \$260,000 damage to the DMV building and its contents.

Vernon left the Buffalo area sometime after the arson and relocated to Canada. The defendant subsequently left Canada and returned to his native Australia. After an Indictment was returned, an application was made to Australia to begin the extradition process of Vernon. He was arrested by Australian authorities on January 6, 2010, and returned to the United States and the Western District of New York on March 22, 2010.

The plea is the result of an investigation conducted by Special Agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, the Buffalo Field Office, under the direction of Acting Resident Agent in Charge, Francis J. Christiano and Fire

Investigators from the Buffalo Fire Department, under the direction of Fire Marshal Joseph Tomizzi. They were assisted in this investigation by members of the New York State Police and employees of the Department of Motor Vehicles.