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Calais Man Pleads Guilty to Federal Firearms Conspiracy Charge

Bangor, Maine: United States Attorney Paula D. Silsby announced that **Leo Blais**, 69, of Calais, pleaded guilty on February 10, 2009, in U.S. District Court in Bangor, to conspiracy to illegally transfer firearms to a Canadian citizen. Blais faces a possible sentence of up to 5 years imprisonment, and a fine of up to \$250,000, or both.

Court records reveal that, as a store clerk in the sporting goods section at Johnson's True Value Hardware in Calais, Blais was involved in the sale of firearms. In March 2006, a Canadian acquaintance of Blais went to Johnson's, selected 14 firearms and asked Blais to set the guns aside for someone to pick up. Another individual, the third co-conspirator, a U.S. citizen, went to Johnson's, produced Maine identification, completed all the necessary ATF paperwork and purchased all 14 firearms that Blais had set aside for the Canadian.

Blais agreed to buy handguns for the Canadian and, in May 2006, purchased two semi-automatic pistols for him at Johnson's. The money to purchase them was provided by the Canadian. For each firearm, Blais completed an ATF Form 4473, indicating he was the true buyer of the firearms, when in fact, he was not. Blais would deliver the guns to the Canadian in a nearby parking lot and the Canadian paid Blais \$50.00 per gun. The Canadian smuggled the guns into Canada for subsequent re-sale.

Later the same year, Blais sold to semi-automatic pistols to a second individual, in Calais, knowing that he was a resident of Canada.

This case was part of Maine's Project Safe Neighborhoods initiative. The initiative coordinates the efforts of federal and state agencies in order to increase the successful prosecution of firearms cases and educate potential offenders on the serious consequences of illegal gun use and possession.

United States Attorney Silsby praised the investigation conducted by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

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