



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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## **BAKERSFIELD MAN FOUND GUILTY OF ALIEN SMUGGLING WITH ENDANGERMENT**

TUCSON -- Kenneth George Claunch, Jr, 55, of Bakersfield, CA, was found guilty of Conspiracy to Transport Illegal Aliens with Endangerment, three counts of Attempted Transportation of Illegal Aliens for Profit and three counts of Attempted Bringing in Illegal Aliens for Profit. Claunch tried to enter the United States from Mexico while driving a carpet cleaning van wherein Customs Inspectors found eight illegal aliens hiding in what appeared to be the water containers used for carpet cleaning, by a federal jury on February 29, 2008, in Tucson. The case was tried before United States District Court Judge Frank R. Zapata beginning on February 26, 2008. The defendant is being held after trial. Sentencing is set before Judge Zapata on May 14, 2008.

The evidence at trial showed that on April 4, 2007, at or near Nogales, Arizona, Kenneth George Claunch, Jr. applied for entry into the United States from Mexico by driving a 2000 Chevrolet carpet cleaning van through the DeConcini Port of Entry. Claunch and his vehicle were referred to secondary after the defendant gave inconsistent statements to the inspectors. While questioning Claunch, inspectors saw one of two large metal containers, resembling large water containers, that were in the rear of the vehicle move. Upon inspection, one of the large containers had five adult males inside and the second container had one adult male and two adult females inside it. All eight of the individuals admitted that they were not citizens or nationals of the United States and that they did not have permission to be in the United States legally. Three of the males were witnesses at the trial. The three adult males stated that while inside the containers they started to have trouble breathing and were becoming dizzy with two of them beginning to have really bad headaches.

Each admitted that they were to pay \$2,900 to \$3000 to be brought into the United States and transported to their final destinations within the United States. Each related that they had been taken to a house with a garage on the Mexican side of the border wherein they were taken to the van and placed within the containers. They related that after being placed in the containers, the van started and drove to the border with no stops in between starting and being found and that while inside after hearing the initial doors closing, they did not hear any changing of the driver.

A conviction for Conspiracy to Transport Illegal Aliens Wherein the Lives of the Aliens were in Danger and Transportation of an Illegal Alien for Profit Wherein the Lives of the Aliens were in Danger carries a maximum penalty of 20 years, a \$ 250,000 fine or both. A conviction for Attempted Bringing In Illegal Aliens for Profit carries a maximum penalty of 10 years, a \$ 250,000 fine or both. In determining an actual sentence, Judge Zapata will consult the U.S. Sentencing Guidelines, which

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provide appropriate sentencing ranges. The judge, however, is not bound by those guidelines in determining a sentence.

The investigation leading to the guilty verdict was conducted by Port of Entry Inspectors with Customs and Border Protection at the Deconcini Port of Entry in Nogales, Arizona. The prosecution was handled by Serra M. Tsethlikai, Assistant U.S. Attorney, District of Arizona, Tucson, Ariz.

CASE NUMBER: CR-07-0791-TUC-FRZ  
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