



PRESS RELEASE

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**FEDERAL INDICTMENTS CHARGE SEVENTEEN DEFENDANTS FOR
TRAFFICKING DRUGS IN LINCOLN AND OTERO COUNTIES**

LAS CRUCES – Seventeen individuals are charged with drug trafficking offenses in two federal indictments that were public posted earlier today, announced U.S. Attorney Kenneth J. Gonzales, Joseph M. Arabit, Special Agent in Charge of the Drug Enforcement Administration’s El Paso Field Division, and DuWayne W. Honahni, Sr., Special Agent in Charge of District IV of the Bureau of Indian Affairs’ Office of Justice Services.

One indictment charges 16 defendants with conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine, cocaine and marijuana in Lincoln County and Otero County, N.M., including the Mescalero Apache Reservation, between Nov. 2011 and Aug. 2012. The indictment, which includes 27 other drug trafficking and related charges, alleges that members of the conspiracy obtained the drugs they distributed from sources of supply in Los Angeles, Calif., and Los Lunas, N.M. The 28-count indictment also seeks forfeiture of property and proceeds derived from or involved in the defendants’ illegal activities.

The second indictment charges two defendants, including one who also is charged in the 16-defendant indictment, with distributing methamphetamine in Otero County, N.M., between June 2011 and Nov. 2011.

The two indictments, which were filed on Aug. 15, 2012, are the result of a multi-agency investigation into drug trafficking activities in Lincoln and Otero Counties that was designated as part of the Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (“OCDETF”) program. OCDETF is a nationwide Department of Justice program that combines the resources and unique expertise of federal agencies, along with their local counterparts, in a coordinated effort to disrupt and dismantle major drug trafficking organizations.

This morning, federal, state and local law enforcement officers arrested six of the 17 defendants, and executed two search warrants at residences in Ruidoso, N.M. Five of the defendants already were in federal custody on related charges. Four other defendants are in state custody and will be transferred to federal custody to face the charges in the indictment. Two defendants have yet to be apprehended and are considered fugitives.

During the ten-month investigation, law enforcement officers purchased an aggregate of 250 grams of methamphetamine, with a retail value of approximately \$12,500, during five separate undercover drug transactions. They also seized a pound and a half of methamphetamine with a wholesale value of approximately \$24,000, and \$7,691 in cash during the course of the investigation.

U.S. Attorney Gonzales commended the investigative work that resulted in the two indictments and said, "These indictments represent the latest chapter in our ongoing effort to eradicate illegal drug trafficking in communities throughout New Mexico. The offenses charged in these indictments are serious and they have very serious consequences for those who live in Lincoln and Otero Counties and Mescalero. Methamphetamine is a devastating drug that destroys lives, families and entire communities, and I commend my law enforcement partners for their unwavering resolve to do battle against the blight of methamphetamine and other illegal drugs in every corner of our state."

"Methamphetamine destroys the lives of its abusers and has far-reaching negative effects in the communities where it takes hold," said DEA Special Agent in Charge Arabit. "Through these arrests and seizures, DEA and its federal, state, and local law enforcement partners have worked together to hold methamphetamine dealers responsible for the harm they cause. We have shut down three distribution networks and, in turn, made our communities safer."

BIA Special Agent in Charge Honahni added, "For more than a decade the invasion of methamphetamine into our tribal communities has devastated Indian Country. Through interagency investigations, we continue to work together at the Local, Tribal, State and Federal level to dismantle drug organizations that supply tribal communities with destructive drugs. BIA continues to work with tribes so that they may have safe and healthy communities."

These cases are being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Renee L. Camacho and Jessica Cardena Jarvis, and were investigated by DEA and the BIA, Office of Justice Service, Mescalero Agency, with assistance from the Capitan Police Department and the Otero County Sheriff's Office. In addition, Homeland Security Investigations, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives, U.S. Border Patrol, New Mexico State Police, Dona Ana County Sheriff's Office, Sunland Park Police Department, the Ruidoso Police Department and the Ruidoso Downs Police Department participated in today's law enforcement operation.

United States v. Chavez, et al. – Summary of the Indictment

Count 1 of the indictment charges all 16 defendants with conspiracy to distribute methamphetamine, cocaine and marijuana. A conviction on this count carries a maximum penalty of not less than ten years and not more than life imprisonment and a \$10,000,000 fine.

Counts 2 and 3 each charge certain defendants with distribution of more than five grams of methamphetamine. A conviction on each of these count carries a maximum penalty of not less than five years and not more than 40 years of imprisonment and a \$5,000,000 fine.

Count 4 charges certain defendants with distribution of more than 50 grams of methamphetamine. A conviction on this count carries a maximum penalty of not less than ten years and not more than life imprisonment and a \$10,000,000 fine.

Counts 5, 7 through 11, 13 through 16, 22, 23, 25 and 26 charge certain defendants with using communication devises to further the commission of drug trafficking crimes. A conviction on any one of these counts carries a maximum penalty of four years of imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

Counts 6, 20 and 24 charge certain defendants with distribution of a mixture and substance containing methamphetamine. A conviction on any one of these counts carries a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment and a \$1,000,000 fine.

Count 12 charges certain defendants with distribution of marijuana. A conviction on this count carries a maximum penalty of five years of imprisonment and a \$250,000 fine.

Counts 17, 18 and 27 charge certain defendants with possession of more than 50 grams of a mixture and substance containing methamphetamine with intent to distribute. A conviction on each of these count carries a maximum penalty of not less than five years and not more than 40 years of imprisonment and a \$5,000,000 fine.

Count 19 charges certain defendants with distribution of cocaine. A conviction on this count carries a maximum penalty of 20 years of imprisonment and a \$1,000,000 fine.

Counts 21 and 28 charge certain defendants with distribution of more than 50 grams of a mixture and substance containing methamphetamine. A conviction on each of these count carries a maximum penalty of not less than five years and not more than 40 years of imprisonment, and a \$5,000,000 fine.

United States v. Chavez, et al., – Charges Against Individual Defendants

Corina Angela Chavez, 47, of Ruidoso Downs, N.M., is charged in Counts 1 through 20, and 22 through 26 of the indictment. Chavez is in state custody and will be transferred to federal custody.

Rosario Guadalupe Padilla-Rabago, 29, a Mexican national, is charged in Counts 1, 3, 4, 21 and 28 of the indictment. Padilla-Rabago has not been arrested and is considered a fugitive.

Francisco Ramon Ochoa-Corrales, 28, a Mexican national, is charged in Counts 1 and 21 of the indictment. Ochoa-Corrales has not been arrested and is considered a fugitive.

Luis Carlos Quezada-Bustillos, 30, a Mexican national residing in Tularosa, N.M., is charged in Counts 1 and 28 of the indictment. Quezada-Bustillos is in federal custody on related charges.

Mauro Barrera-Estrada, 34, a Mexican national, is charged in Counts 1, 9, 17, 18 and 19 of the indictment. Mauro Barrera-Estrada is in state custody and will be transferred to federal custody.

Gustavo Barrera-Estrada, 51, a Mexican national, is charged in Counts 1, 17, 18 and 19 of the indictment. Gustavo Barrera-Estrada is in federal custody on related charges.

Federico Soto, 21, of Ruidoso Downs, N.M., is charged in Counts 1 and 15 of the indictment. Soto was arrested during today's law enforcement operation.

Julio Caro, 34, a Mexican national residing in Los Lunas, N.M., is charged in Counts 1 and 27 of the indictment. Caro is in federal custody on related charges.

Jayne Marie Lopez, 28, of Los Lunas, N.M., is charged in Counts 1 and 27 of the indictment. Lopez is in federal custody on related charges.

Shanae Seiko Maria Vasco, 27, of Belen, N.M., is charged in Counts 1 and 27 of the indictment. Vasco is in federal custody on related charges.

Brandi Aguirre, 25, of Ruidoso, N.M., is charged in Counts 1, 8, 10 and 13 of the indictment. Aguirre was arrested during today's law enforcement operation.

Michelle Lavern Sandoval, 41, of Ruidoso, N.M., is charged in Counts 1, 5, 6 and 25 of the indictment. Sandoval was arrested during today's law enforcement operation.

James Robert Fender, 52, of Ruidoso Downs, N.M., is charged in Counts 1, 25 and 26 of the indictment. Fender was arrested during today's law enforcement operation.

Justin R. Sergeant, 25, of Ruidoso, N.M., is charged in Counts 1, 7, 14 and 16 of the indictment. Sergeant was arrested during today's law enforcement operation.

Manuel Paul Blackmon, 37, of Ruidoso, N.M., is charged in Counts 1, 20 and 23 of the indictment. Blackmon is in state custody and will be transferred to federal custody.

Graciela Alvarez-Lara, 41 of Ruidoso Downs, N.M., is charged in Counts 1, 11, 12 and 22 of the indictment. Alvarez-Lara was arrested during today's law enforcement operation.

United States v. Marker, et al. The indictment in this case charges Warren Boyd Marker, 50, of Alamogordo, N.M., and James Robert Fender, 52, of Ruidoso Downs, N.M., with two counts of distribution of more than five grams of actual methamphetamine. A conviction on each of these count carries a maximum penalty of not less than five years and not more than 40 years of imprisonment, and a \$5,000,000 fine. Marker is in state custody and will be transferred to federal custody. As noted above, Fender was arrested this morning.

Charges in indictments are only accusations. All criminal defendants are presumed innocent unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

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