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UNITED STATES ATTORNEY HIGHLIGHTS PROGRESS ON FIREARM PROSECUTION INITIATIVE, "PROJECT SAFE NEIGHBORHOODS," TARGETING CONVICTED FELONS POSSESSING FIREARMS AND ANNOUNCES INDICTMENTS IN TWO SACRAMENTO CASES, ONE STOCKTON CASE, AND ONE PLUMAS COUNTY CASE.

(SACRAMENTO) United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott joined with federal and local law enforcement authorities to report on implementation of a federal firearm prosecution initiative, "Project Safe Neighborhoods (PSN)." A major priority for President George W. Bush and Attorney General John Ashcroft, PSN promotes a collaborative effort between local and federal authorities to reduce gun violence by targeting convicted felons prosecuted for possessing firearms.

The theme for Project Safe Neighborhoods is "Hard Time for Gun Crime." Depending on an offender's prior criminality, federal law can provide significantly more severe sanctions than corresponding state law. As such, targeted federal prosecution can serve as a significant deterrent to convicted felons arming themselves with firearms.

Implemented during federal Fiscal Year 2001, the number of defendants charged as felons in possession of firearms in the Eastern District of California have risen significantly. Between 2000 and 2003, there was an 85% increase in federal prosecutions. As the attached graph illustrates, in FY 2000 there were 48 cases and in FY 2001 there were 59. Subsequent to enactment of PSN, the numbers rose to 81 cases for FY 2002 and 89 cases for FY 2003, which concluded October 1 of this year.

Earlier today, at 2:45 p.m. EST, Attorney General held a press conference in Washington D.C. on Project Safe Neighborhoods. General Ashcroft stated, "Newly released data shows record-levels of federal prosecutions of gun crime. Gun criminals are paying unprecedented penalties, and law-abiding Americans are enjoying unprecedented safety. Under President Bush's leadership, Project Safe Neighborhoods is making a tremendous difference in ensuring that gun crime means hard time."

Stated United States Attorney Scott, "Convicted felons and firearms can be a lethal combination. Working with local and federal law enforcement authorities, we will continue to crack down on felons caught possessing guns. Federal law can provide a severe hammer for these offenders and we will use it when warranted."

“The only way to achieve success in reducing gun violence is through collaborative efforts with the U.S. Attorney’s offices and our state and local partners, especially the local police departments,” observed John Torres, Special Agent in Charge of Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF), San Francisco Field Division. Mr. Torres’ division covers Northern California, from Bakersfield to the Oregon border, as well as the state of Nevada.

Mr. Scott also announced that the federal grand jury earlier today returned the following indictments for the offense of being a felon in possession of a firearm:

- JIM CHARLES BUCKLEY, age 30, of North Highlands. Buckley has two prior felony convictions involving a controlled substance offense, and two prior felony convictions for evading a police officer and escape from jail. If convicted, the maximum penalty for the charge under federal law is 10 years in federal prison, a \$250,000 fine and a three-year term of supervised release. There is no parole on a federal sentence. This case was investigated by the Sacramento County Sheriff’s Office and the ATF.
- JAMES KIVEN GOLDSMITH, age 25, of Sacramento. Goldsmith has three prior felony convictions, one for assault with a deadly weapon, and two controlled substance offenses. If convicted, the maximum penalty for the charge under federal law is 10 years in federal prison, a \$250,000 fine and a three-year term of supervised release. This case was investigated by the Sacramento County Sheriff’s Office and the ATF.
- ROGER DALE BETTS, age 50, of Portola. Betts has one prior felony conviction for arson. If convicted, the maximum penalty for the charge under federal law is 10 years in federal prison, a \$250,000 fine and a three-year term of supervised release. This case was investigated by the Plumas County Sheriff’s Office and the ATF.
- MICHAEL ANTHONY BLACK, age 32, of Stockton. Black has four prior felony convictions. One for accessory after the fact, one for being a felon in possession of a firearm, and two convictions for possession of cocaine base for sale. If convicted, the maximum penalty under federal law is 55 years in federal prison, a \$2 million fine, and an four-year term of supervised release. There is no parole on a federal sentence. This case was investigated by the ATF and the DEA.

The charges contained in the indictments are only allegations and the defendants are presumed innocent until and unless proven guilty beyond a reasonable doubt.

Project Safe Neighborhoods provides discretion to each of the 94 federal districts on how best to develop the program to fit their local needs. Reflecting the fact that the Eastern District of California, which extends from the Oregon border to Bakersfield, is comprised of both significant urban cores and large rural expanses, the PSN program for the Eastern District is tailored to address both urban and rural gun problems. U.S. Attorney Scott has conducted extensive outreach to law enforcement officials in the rural counties of the Eastern District, encouraging referral of felons in possession of firearm offenses for federal prosecution.

Early in 2004, the Eastern District will make available over \$1 million in federal grant funds under PSN to assist local law enforcement and others in targeting gun violence. Additionally, in early March, the District will host a major training conference for federal, state, and local law

enforcement authorities on the investigation and prosecution of gun crimes.

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