Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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MINNEAPOLIS— A federal indictment unsealed in part late yesterday charges 24 alleged members of the Native Mob gang with conspiracy to participate in racketeering activity and other crimes. The Native Mob is a regional criminal gang that originated in Minneapolis in the early 1990s. Members routinely engage in drug trafficking, assault, robbery, and murder. Membership is estimated at 200, with new members, including juveniles, regularly recruited from communities with large, young, male, Native American populations. Association with the gang is often signified by wearing red and black clothing or sporting gang-related tattoos.

The 47-count indictment was unsealed as to six defendants who made their initial federal court appearances late yesterday afternoon. They were apprehended earlier Tuesday, during a take-down conducted by between 100 and 150 local, state, federal, and tribal law enforcement officials. Arrests were made on the White Earth, Mille Lacs, and Leech Lake Indian reservations as well as in the Twin Cities. Of the 18 remaining defendants, 12 are presently in jail or prison on other charges, while six continue to be sought by law enforcement. The six individuals arrested yesterday remain in custody pending their next hearings, scheduled for January 26th and 27th.

Earlier today, U.S. Attorney B. Todd Jones said of the investigation, “This investigation exemplifies the law enforcement cooperation we are fortunate to experience here in Minnesota. Local, state, federal, and tribal investigators worked side by side to take down some of the most 2 violent criminals in our state and, in the process, disrupt an extremely dangerous gang that diminishes the quality of life for those who live and work in Native American communities. We owe a debt of gratitude to everyone involved in the investigation. Their efforts have made our streets and communities much safer.”

The indictment alleges that since at least the mid-1990s, the defendants named in this case and others have conspired to conduct criminal activity through an “enterprise,” namely, the Native Mob, in violation of the federal Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act (“RICO”). The indictment alleges that the primary objective of this “enterprise” is to preserve, protect, promote, and enhance the Native Mob’s power, territory, and financial gains.

To that end, gang members purportedly distribute illegal drugs, from crack cocaine to ecstasy. They also reportedly provide monetary support to other members, including those incarcerated; share with one another police reports, victim statements, and other case discovery; hinder or obstruct officials from identifying or apprehending those wanted by the law; and intimidate witnesses to Native Mob crimes. Moreover, they purportedly maintain and circulate firearms for gang use and commit acts of violence, including murder, against individuals associated with rival gangs.

Those charged in this indictment, along with their last known residence, include—

Dale Wesley Ballinger, Jr., age 20, Isle, arrested this morning

Damien Lee Beaulieu, age 20, Onamia, arrested this morning

Aaron James Gilbert, Jr., age 24, Minneapolis, arrested this morning

Cory Gene Oquist, age 22, Bemidji, arrested this morning

Dale John Pindegayosh, age 29, Cass Lake, arrested this morning

Justen Lee Poitra, age 26, Cass Lake, arrested this morning

In addition to the racketeering charge filed against all 24 defendants, other charges were levied against just some of the defendants. Those charges include conspiracy to use and carry firearms during and in relation to a crime of violence, the use and carrying of firearms during and in relation to a crime of violence, assault with a dangerous weapon in aid of racketeering, attempted murder in aid of racketeering, felon in possession of ammunition, felon in possession of a firearm, armed career criminal in possession of a firearm, possession of a firearm in furtherance of a drug trafficking crime and a crime of violence, conspiracy to distribute and possess with intent to distribute controlled substances, possession with intent to distribute a controlled substance, distributing a controlled substance, and tampering with a witness. (See the attached chart for a breakdown of charges by defendant. Note, until such time as defendants make their initial appearances in federal court, their names and the specific charges levied against them will not be disclosed.)

If convicted, the defendants face a potential maximum sentence of between 20 years and life in federal prison. Since the federal justice system does not have parole, prison terms would be served virtually in entirety. All sentences will ultimately be determined by a federal district court judge.

3 This case is the result of a long-term, cross-jurisdictional investigation conducted by local, state, federal, and tribal law enforcement officers dedicated to making our streets and communities safer. They include the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms & Explosives; the Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension; the Carlton County Sheriff's Office; the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration; the FBI-funded Headwaters Safe Trails Task Force; the Mille Lacs Tribal Police Department; the Bemidji Police Department; the Minneapolis Police Department; the Minnesota Department of Corrections; the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs; and the Paul Bunyan Drug Task Force.

These agencies investigated this case with assistance from—in alphabetical order—the Becker County Sheriff's Office, the Beltrami County Sheriff's Office, the Carlton County Attorney's Office, the Cass County Attorney's Office, the Cass County Sheriff's Office, the Crow Wing County Sheriff's Office, the Douglas County Sheriff's Office of Wisconsin, the Duluth Police Department, the Fon du Lac Tribal Police Department, the Fridley Police Department, the Itasca County Sheriff's Department, the Hennepin County Attorney's Office, the Hennepin County Sheriff's Office, the Hubbard County Sheriff's Office, the Leech Lake Tribal Police Department, the LCO Reservation Police Department, the Lower Sioux Tribal Police Department, the Mahnomen County Sheriff's Office, the Minnesota State Patrol, the Mille Lacs County Attorney's Office, the Mille Lacs County Sheriff's Office, the New Brighton Police Department, the North Central Drug Task Force, the Prior Lake Police Department, the Red Lake Tribal Police Department, the Redwood County Sheriff's Office, Richfield Police Department, the Sherburne County Sheriff's Office, the St. Paul Police Department, the U.S. Marshals Service, the Minneapolis Violent Offender Task Force, the Washington County Sheriff's Office, and the White Earth Tribal Police Department.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Andrew R. Winter and Steven L. Schleicher.

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An indictment is a determination by a grand jury that there is probable cause to believe that offenses have been committed by a defendant. A defendant, of course, is presumed innocent until he or she pleads guilty or is proven guilty at trial.