



**U.S. Department of Justice
U.S. Attorney's Office
Western District of Texas**

Johnny Sutton, U.S. Attorney

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

June 17, 2003

Shana Jones, Special Assistant
Daryl Fields, Public Affairs Officer
610 N.W. Loop 410
San Antonio, Texas 78216
(210) 384-7452

PECOS JURY FINDS EL PASO MAN GUILTY OF ALIEN SMUGGLING

United States Attorney Johnny Sutton announced today that a federal jury in Pecos, Texas, found KENNETH JACK PEKEL, 47 years old, guilty of six counts of alien smuggling. The trial which began yesterday ended today after only 45 minutes deliberation by the jury.

U.S. Attorney Johnny Sutton stated, "Today's conviction reflects the commitment of the U.S. Attorney's Office to aggressively prosecute alien smuggling cases - especially when the lives of others are placed in jeopardy."

On March 10, 2003, Pekel was arrested along with his co-defendant, ARTHUR VERNER JOHNSON, a long-haul truck driver, as they attempted to smuggle twenty-one illegal aliens past the U.S. Border Patrol Checkpoint at Sierra Blanca, Texas. On May 9, 2003, Defendant Johnson pled guilty to the indictment charging him with the same offenses.

Evidence presented at trial revealed that all twenty-one of the illegal immigrants were discovered inside a large wooden crate which was tightly wrapped with a tarp and strapped to a flat-bed trailer. Border Patrol Agents discovered there was no fresh air or ventilation in the crate, nor was food or water available. The illegal immigrants were being transported from El Paso to Dallas, Texas. They were locked inside the crate with no way to escape in the case of an emergency.

Evidence was also presented that showed Johnson was paid \$4,000 to smuggle the individuals to Dallas with Pekel receiving \$500 for assisting him in the transportation.

Both defendants faces a maximum sentence of 90 years in prison. Pekel's sentencing is set for August 21, 2003. This case was investigated by the U.S. Border Patrol Anti Smuggling Unit and was prosecuted for the government by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Gary Tromblay and Dwight Goains.

#####