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MAN SENTENCED FOR HATE CRIME AND MAIL FRAUD COMMITTED IN CHICO

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — United States Attorney Benjamin B. Wagner announced that today United States District Judge Morrison C. England Jr. sentenced Eric Clawson, 28, of San Francisco, to three years and one month in prison to be followed by three years of supervised release for depriving the civil rights of an African-American man when he assaulted the victim in a Chico bar and for an unrelated case of one count of mail fraud. Clawson pleaded guilty today to the mail fraud conviction and was ordered to pay \$92,804 in restitution.

On March 24, 2010, following a three-day trial, a federal jury convicted Clawson of the federal hate crime charge. The evidence at trial showed that on the evening of July 6, 2008, Clawson entered Riley's Bar & Grill in Chico and used a racially derogatory term to object to the presence of the victim, who was a complete stranger to the defendant. Clawson repeated this slur several times before approaching the victim and punching him in the face without any provocation. The assault rendered the victim unconscious and inflicted injuries to his face and mouth. An associate of Clawson who was with Clawson when the assault took place, Joe Grivette, pleaded guilty on March 15, 2010, to a related charge of concealing a felony.

"Racial violence is offensive to our nation's fundamental values," said Thomas E. Perez, Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "The Justice Department is committed to vigorously prosecuting the federal laws prohibiting violent acts motivated by hate."

"The defendant's unprovoked racial attack on a fellow citizen who was patronizing a commercial establishment is precisely the sort of crime that the federal civil rights laws were intended to cover," said United States Attorney Benjamin B. Wagner. "Prosecuting hate crimes and mortgage fraud are two priorities of this U.S. Attorney's Office. That we were able, in a single proceeding, to hold a defendant accountable for both types of offenses indicates that our focus on these crimes is yielding results."

According to Clawson's guilty plea to the mail fraud charge, he admitted that he fraudulently purchased two properties in Chico in 2007 by knowingly signing loan applications that contained false employment histories and inflated income. He also falsely claimed he would occupy the second property as his primary residence. Falsified documents were submitted to lenders in order to obtain the loans.

This case was prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Russell Carlberg of the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Eastern District of California and Trial Attorney Edward Chung of the Civil Rights Division. The case was investigated by FBI Special Agent Mark Roberts and officers of the Butte County Sheriff's Department and the Chico Police Department.

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