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Cox pleads guilty to mortgage fraud in Atlanta

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Former fugitive Matthew Bevan Cox pleaded guilty Tuesday in federal district court in Atlanta to mortgage fraud, identity theft, passport fraud, and probation violation charges.

The 37-year-old's mortgage fraud schemes spanned Atlanta; Nashville, Tenn.; and Tampa, Fla. Cox was on the run from the federal government for three years. He now faces a maximum sentence of 54 years in prison and a fine of up to \$2 million. Sentencing is set for Aug. 22 before U.S. District Judge Timothy C. Batten Jr. in Atlanta.

According to U.S. Attorney David E. Nahmias and court information, Cox rented or agreed to purchase properties from true owners, fraudulently erased prior mortgage liens and assumed the identity of the owners, used a stolen identity or paid straw borrowers to obtain multiple mortgage loans on the same property. Cox then changed locations and committed similar mortgage fraud schemes in other states.

Cox and his coconspirators used stolen identities to execute the mortgage fraud, including identities of minor children and those he received from conducting "Federal Surveys" of the homeless and drug rehab patients. Cox also used the stolen identities to get drivers licenses and state identification cards, buy vehicles, lease mail drops and virtual offices, rent apartments, get credit cards, open bank accounts, and to apply for birth certificates and a passport used for travel to Jamaica, Greece and other foreign destinations while a federal fugitive.

Cox was indicted by a federal grand jury in Atlanta on Sept. 29, 2005, on 42 counts of mortgage fraud, identity theft, money laundering and conspiracy. The Middle Districts of Tennessee and Florida filed criminal information earlier in April charging conspiracy to commit mortgage fraud, aggravated identity theft and passport fraud. Cox pleaded guilty to conspiracy to commit mortgage fraud, bank fraud, aggravated identity theft and passport fraud.

"Cox was the subject of a three-year nationwide manhunt while he continued to commit mortgage fraud under stolen identities in multiple states, leaving a trail of victims and missing money," Nahmias said. "The repeated use by Cox of the stolen identities of minor children, the homeless and others to place multiple fraudulent loans on the same property without the knowledge or consent of the true owners has resulted in clouded property titles in several states and years of unresolved litigation. He will now face the long prison sentence he deserves for his crimes."

Cox first became a fugitive when he was charged with probation violations on Dec. 22, 2003, arising from his Feb. 19, 2002 mortgage fraud conviction in Tampa. An arrest warrant was also issued for Cox in Atlanta when he was charged with mortgage fraud by criminal complaint in July 2004. Following a well-publicized nationwide manhunt, Cox was arrested by the U.S. Secret Service in Nashville on Nov. 16, 2006.

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