
Every day, many Americans commit crimes of which they are unaware. Many of the crimes with which Americans are charged are absurd. One recent case is that of three Americans sentenced in federal court to eight years in prison for importing lobster tails from Honduras in plastic bags instead of cardboard boxes. Why this matters, no one knows. Moreover, the importers of the lobster tails have no responsibility for how the seafood was packed in Honduras.

Federal prosecutors decided that Honduran law was violated by the shipment, because a few tails (3 percent of the shipment) were less than 5.5 inches in length.

The Honduran government objects to this interpretation of its law and filed a brief in behalf of the defendants, but federal judges nevertheless convicted their fellow citizens for violating the Lacey Act by importing "fish or wildlife taken, possessed, transported or sold in violation of any foreign law."

To ensure a harsh sentence, the prosecutors loaded up charges against the defendants by bringing indictments for smuggling, money laundering and conspiracy. Smuggling is inferred from a few of the tails allegedly being undersized and illegal. Money laundering is charged because the lobster purchase and sale required money to be deposited in a bank. Conspiracy is charged on the basis that more than one person was involved.

In other words, these are totally trumped-up crimes.

The upshot is that three Americans have had their lives ruined by federal prosecutors and judges for violating a Honduran law that the Honduran president, attorney general and embassy say is not on their country's statute books.