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Judge Views Noriega Deals As 'Obscene'

*Rules on Sentencing
Questioned by Jurist*

Post
Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo., Oct. 4— U.S. District Judge Scott O. Wright has questioned why rules prohibited him from reducing the sentence of a drug informant when "obscene" deals are being made in the trial of Manuel Antonio Noriega.

"If they can do what they're doing down there in the trial of Noriega, they ought to be able to do something here," Wright said Wednesday in rare public criticism by a federal judge of matters in another courtroom. "I mean they're cutting deals down there that are obscene."

Noriega, the deposed Panamanian leader, is accused of taking bribes and turning Panama into a drug way-station for the Medellin cartel. Several drug traffickers-turned-informants have testified or are expected to testify against him, and lavish but legal prosecution deals with them have been criticized.

Wright made his comments during sentencing of Sal Pellegrino, who received a five-year sentence for a 1989 plane theft and a 15-year term in a 1990 drug case stemming from the theft.

Wright reduced the longer sentence to the 27 months Pellegrino has served but said he could not reduce the plane theft sentence because of federal rules.

Federal prosecutors are permitted to ask for sentence reductions within a year of sentencing if a defendant has helped in other investigations. But because Pellegrino was sentenced on the theft in 1989, neither Wright nor Assistant U.S. Attorney John Osgood, who said he would have approved the reduction, had authority to mitigate the punishment this week.

Pellegrino, 28, must serve the remainder of the five-year sentence and was ordered to a "boot camp" program for six months, followed by time in a halfway house and electronically monitored home detention.