

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 4, 2011

Via Electronic Transmission

Kenneth E. Melson
Acting Director
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives
99 New York Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20226

Dear Acting Director Melson:

Due to my inquiry into the ATF's Operation Fast and Furious, I am concerned that the ATF may have employed the same risky strategy of encouraging weapons trafficking that was employed elsewhere by the ATF, beyond the Phoenix Field Office and its Operation "Fast and Furious."

As you know, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) Agent Jaime Zapata was murdered in Mexico on February 15. According to a press report based on an unnamed source, the weapon used to kill Zapata "was shipped through Laredo with the possible knowledge of the ATF," and "the feds were already investigating the suspects when the gun was sent to Mexico."¹ According to another report in the Dallas Morning News:

In North Texas . . . ATF agents were conducting another Project Gunrunner surveillance operation involving brothers Otilio and Ranferi Osorio. ATF and Drug Enforcement Administration officials organized the November undercover transfer of about 40 weapons believed to be destined for a Mexican drug cartel. When Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agent Jaime Zapata was gunned down Feb. 15 in Mexico, ballistics tests and a partial serial number linked one weapon used in the shooting to Otilio Osorio.²

In its March 1 press release announcing the arrest of the Osorio brothers as well as their next-door neighbor Kelvin Morrison, the Department of Justice (DOJ) confirmed that all three men were being investigated by the ATF as early as last November. Prior to the 40 weapons referenced above being confiscated in Laredo, the Osorio brothers and Morrison provided the guns to an ATF confidential informant in Dallas in a meeting set up by the ATF. After the delivery of the illegal weapons, the three men were stopped by local police. Why were these traffickers not thereafter arrested in November?

¹ Terry Wallace, "ATF: Gun in US agent's death traced to Texas man," *Associated Press*, February 28, 2011.

² "Federal gun-smuggling surveillance program backfires," *Dallas Morning News*, March 3, 2011.

Naturally, this raises questions about whether the ATF strategy of allowing straw purchasers to continue to operate in hopes of making bigger cases may have contributed to the shooting of ICE Agent Jaime Zapata. Please provide written answers to the following questions:

- (1) Although the gun used in the assault on Agent Zapata that has been traced back to the U.S. was purchased on October 10, 2010, how can we know that it did not make its way down to Mexico after the November investigation, when the arrest of these three criminals might have prevented the gun from being trafficked and later used to murder Agent Zapata?
- (2) When did law enforcement first become aware that Morrison purchased the gun?
- (3) Given that the likely recipients of any trafficked guns were so close to the border, did any ATF personnel raise concerns about the possibility of those guns being used against U.S. law enforcement? If so, how did the ATF address those concerns?
- (4) Did any ATF personnel raise concerns about the wisdom of allowing individuals like the Osorio brothers or Morrison to continue their activities after the November weapons transfer? If so, how did the ATF address those concerns?

In addition to answering those questions, please provide all records relating to:

- (5) When law enforcement officials first became aware of the trafficking activities of Otilio and Ranferi Osorio and Kelvin Morrison;
- (6) Surveillance that may have been conducted on the Osorio brothers or Morrison prior to the November transfer of weapons between the ATF's confidential informant and the Osorio brothers and Morrison;
- (7) The November transfer; and
- (8) Any surveillance that law enforcement continued to conduct on the Osorio brothers or Morrison after the November transfer.

Please contact my staff no later than March 7, 2011 to schedule a briefing on this matter. Should you have any questions regarding this letter, please contact Tristan Leavitt at (202) 224-5225.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Chuck Grassley".

Charles E. Grassley
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable Eric H. Holder, Jr.
Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530