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Column: Atty. Gen. Holder's Disappointing Appearance Before the House Judiciary Committee on ATF Controversy

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By Allan Lengel

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WASHINGTON — Whether you agree with Atty. General Eric Holder Jr. or not, most reasonable people would conclude that he's a pretty decent guy and a straight shooter.

That being said, it makes his appearance before the House Judiciary Committee on Tuesday all the more disappointing.

I'm referring to his exchange with Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif), who started grilling Holder about the controversial and embarrassing ATF program known as Operation Fast and Furious, which encouraged gun dealers to sell to straw purchasers — all with the hopes of tracing the guns to the upper ranks of the Mexican cartels. Problem is, ATF lost track of some guns, which may have been used to kill Americans including a border patrol agent.

Issa questioned Holder and tried to figure out who in the Justice Department gave the green light for the program. Holder responded rather tentatively.

Was it deputy Attorney Gen. James Cole, Issa asked. Not likely, Holder said, because "I think" he wasn't in the department at the time it started. Was it Lanny Breuer, chief of the Justice Department criminal division?

"I'm not sure whether Mr. Breuer authorized it," Holder responded.

REALLY.

At this stage it's hard to believe Holder doesn't know — at least whether the chief of his criminal division authorized it. And perhaps it's just as bad if he never wandered down the hall to ask.

It's not too hard to find out.

It was not a pretty performance on Tuesday, not a very credible one.

Holder is better than that.

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