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Subject: NSSF Government Relations re: Fast and Furious -

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NSSF Statement on “Fast and Furious”

Posted: 15 Jun 2011 11:03 AM PDT

A report issued earlier this week by Sen. Charles R. Grassley (R-IA) and Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.) accused the Justice Department of allowing nearly 2,500 guns to flow illegally into Mexico as part of an operation dubbed “Fast and Furious” that has been the centerpiece of hearings, continuing today, before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF), the trade association for the firearms industry, has been closely following the congressional investigation into Operation Fast and Furious. According to the congressional report, firearms were allowed to be illegally smuggled (“walked”) into Mexico. The report also indicates that ATF requested federally licensed firearms retailers in Arizona who were cooperating in this investigation to permit these transactions to occur, even though a number of them expressed reservations and concerns to ATF. These allegations, if true, are serious and troubling.

At a March 10 congressional hearing, Attorney General Eric Holder Jr. said, “We cannot have a situation where guns are allowed to walk, and I’ve made that clear to the U.S. Attorney as well as the agents in charge of various ATF offices.” Attorney General Holder has ordered the Acting Inspector General of the Department of Justice to conduct a thorough investigation into this matter. NSSF supports the call for a thorough investigation. Acting ATF Director Kenneth Melson has also announced his intention to form a multi-disciplinary panel of law enforcement professionals to review ATF’s current firearms trafficking strategies. We believe such a review is appropriate, and it is important to refrain from prematurely drawing any conclusions or making assumptions about this matter until the investigation is complete and all the facts are known.

Earlier this year, President Obama, in a joint appearance with Mexican President Calderon, noted the need to address the role that straw purchasing plays in illegal gun trafficking operations. Members of the firearms industry, through NSSF, have for over a decade supported and helped fund the *Don’t Lie for the Other Guy* campaign. A joint effort between ATF and NSSF, the *Don’t Lie for the Other Guy* campaign helps to educate firearms retailers on how to better detect and prevent illegal purchases of firearms and warns the public that it is a serious crime to engage in a straw purchase: “Buy a gun for someone who can’t, buy yourself 10 years in jail.” NSSF calls on Congress, the Department of Justice and the Administration to continue funding *Don’t Lie for the Other Guy* so that this industry-supported initiative will help to prevent illegal purchases nationwide.

Members of the firearms industry are proud of their longstanding cooperative relationship with federal, state and local law enforcement. Federally licensed firearms retailers serve as a primary source of information for law enforcement combating illegal firearm trafficking and routinely report questionable transactions to authorities, including ATF. Throughout this congressional investigation, it has been suggested that federally licensed retailers were the original source of information that gave rise to Operation Fast and Furious. Also surfacing during the course of this investigation is that firearms retailers allowed

ATF special agents to stand behind the counter of their shops so that they were better able to observe the transactions.

NSSF continues to encourage all firearms retailers to cooperate with law enforcement and to report any suspicious transactions, including potential illegal straw purchases. What recent events have shown is that ours is a responsible industry that cooperates with law enforcement in its efforts to combat the criminal acquisition and misuse of firearms.

NSSF Contributes Grant to Supplement NAWCA

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Demonstrating its continued support for conservation, members of the firearms industry, through the National Shooting Sports Foundation (NSSF) – the industry’s trade association – have donated \$150,000 to supplement congressional funding of the North American Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA) — a grant program providing federal cost-share funding to support the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. This year’s payment of \$150,000 is part of an NSSF five-year initiative that will total \$750,000 to support wetlands conservation.

“The firearms and ammunition industries are America’s foremost champions of wildlife conservation,” said Lawrence G. Keane, NSSF senior vice president and general counsel. “This donation to migratory bird habitat is just one example of how the National Shooting Sports Foundation and its members are working to preserve, protect and enhance our nation’s strong heritage of wildlife conservation, hunting access and Second Amendment rights. This commitment will serve to the betterment of sportsmen and the game they pursue for generations to come.”

The NSSF grant has taken on increased importance since the interest generated from the taxes collected on sporting arms and ammunition have been decreasing.

“In order to ensure the strength and sustainability of our nation’s wetlands, it is imperative that NAWCA be well-funded,” said Dale Hall, chief executive officer, Ducks Unlimited. “This generous donation from the National Shooting Sports Foundation, and NSSF’s larger commitment to wetland conservation, will go a long way in helping to guarantee that our culture of hunting and fishing is passed down to the next generation.”

“Since 1961, the National Shooting Sports Foundation has been instrumental in ensuring a strong future for tomorrow’s hunters and anglers. This contribution to NAWCA demonstrates how the firearms and ammunition industries continue to build upon their unprecedented commitment to the conservation of our nation’s wildlife and its habitat.” said Rowan Gould, Acting Director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Anti-Gun Report Shows DECLINE in Number of US Firearms Being Traced to Mexico

Posted: 15 Jun 2011 09:01 AM PDT

Once again anti-gun legislators are attempting to misrepresent firearm tracing data, though this time, with declining numbers and a public wary of political posturing, it may just backfire on them.

A report (“Halting US Firearms Trafficking to *Mexico*“) released Monday by a trio of anti-gun senators including Diane Feinstein (D-CA), Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI) appears to show the number of firearms that have been recovered in Mexico and traced to the United States as actually declining in recent years from an unsubstantiated 90 percent to, now, an unsubstantiated 70 percent.

It is important to note that these percentages do not reflect the total number of firearms recovered. In fact, in a letter to Sen. Feinstein discussing this very report, ATF Acting Director Kenneth Melson admitted, “There are no United States Government sources that maintain any record of the total number of criminal firearms seized in Mexico.”

So to be clear, the 70 percent claim relates only to the very small number of traced firearms – not the total number of firearms recovered. And it’s no surprise that so many come from the United States. We have a very good system for tracing firearms through serial numbers and purchase records (some countries don’t trace them at all). Mexico recognizes this fact and submits for tracing only those firearms that it believes would likely prove trace positive.

Earlier this year a report by the independent research group STRATFOR noted that less than 12 percent of the total number of guns seized in Mexico during 2008 had been verified as coming from the United States. STRATFOR cited a *June 2009 U.S.*

Government Accountability Office (GAO) report noting:

§ 30,000 firearms were seized from criminals by Mexican authorities in 2008.

§ Of these 30,000 firearms, information pertaining to 7,200 of them (24 percent) was submitted to the ATF for tracing.

§ Of these 7,200 guns, only about 4,000 could be traced by the ATF.

§ Of these 4,000, some 3,480 (87 percent) were shown to have come from the United States.

The Feinstein report follows an update to the *U.S. Firearms Trafficking to Mexico Report* issued by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. According to that update, Mexican authorities have submitted trace requests for “tens of thousands of firearms” to the ATF. However, the ATF has stated that many of these requests are duplicative, with some firearms being resubmitted for tracing five times or more. Moreover, the update notes that 75 percent of the firearm traces are not successful and that only eight percent lead to an investigation. Furthermore, as ATF has repeatedly stated, the tracing of a firearm (or the opening of an investigation) in no way indicates criminal wrong-doing by either the retailer or the first purchaser of the firearm.

The Wilson report also notes that most of the traced firearms were originally sold at retail more than five years earlier. The report doesn't say how much earlier, but ATF has previously said that firearms traced from Mexico were on average 14 years old. This demonstrates that of the small percentage of guns that do come from the United States, these firearms have not been purchased recently.

Despite attempts by anti-gun legislators to utilize these reports as leverage for pushing gun control, no one should be under any illusions; the United States is no more the source of 70 percent of the weapons used by the Mexican cartels than it is 90 percent. These numbers only allege to relate to the small percentage of seized and traceable firearms submitted to the ATF.

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