



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on December 3, 2011

Documents Show Top Officials Lied About Fast & Furious

The administration was forced to release more than 1,300 pages of documents related to the gun-trafficking program. The subpoenaed records [reveal](#) frantic e-mail communications between senior officials about how vigorously to defend the operation, as well as concerns about the veracity of some of the proposed defenses.

Several of the exchanges also expressed worries that if the administration were to cooperate with the congressional investigation, Congress would press for even more information. Others highlight the general fear among those involved that exposure would damage the image of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (still known as ATF).



One e-mail from U.S. Attorney Dennis Burke, who oversaw much of the gun trafficking, [recommends](#) sending a “stern missive” to the *Arizona Republic* newspaper for exposing the scheme. “Just baffling that they refuse to engage even just to protect the integrity of the agency,” he wrote in a February 1 e-mail to Justice Department Criminal Division boss Lanny Breuer. In another e-mail, Burke complains that congressional investigators were acting as “willing stooges” for defenders of the right to keep and bear arms.

The documents that were released to the press also [show](#) that top officials urged the Department of Justice to issue a strong and categorical denial of accusations made by ATF whistleblowers. And in the end, despite the seriousness of lying to Congress, that is precisely what happened.

In a February 4 letter to Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), for example, DOJ legislative affairs boss Ron Weich offered a series of blatantly false statements. “ATF makes every effort to interdict weapons that were purchased illegally and prevent their transportation to Mexico,” Weich falsely claimed in the letter. The official response also inaccurately stated that the ATF had not “sanctioned” or knowingly allowed illegally purchased assault weapons to cross the border.

Holder [admitted](#) some of the lies on November 8 in testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee. While acknowledging that the denials contained in the letter were “inaccurate,” however, he attempted to blame lower-ranking officials in field offices. Finally, yesterday, after it had already become public knowledge, senior administration officials formally withdrew the letter and the lies contained within it.

“Facts have come to light during the course of this investigation that indicate the February 4 letter contains inaccuracies,” [wrote](#) Deputy Attorney General James Cole in the December 2 letter to Congress withdrawing the previous false statements. But he, too, tried to deflect responsibility.

“Department personnel ... relied on information provided by supervisors from the components in the best position to know the relevant facts: ATF and the U.S. Attorney’s Office in Arizona,” Cole noted in



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the letter. “Information provided by those supervisors was inaccurate.”

Before the earlier letter was officially withdrawn, however, Sen. Grassley and congressional investigators had already determined that it was filled with false information. And outrage — in Congress and among the public — was already boiling.

“It’s unconscionable that a federal agency would let such a misleading letter stand for more than nine months,” Grassley [said](#) last month. “The head of the Criminal Division knew it was false, his deputy knew it was false, the whistleblowers knew it was false, the documents suggested it was false, and I discovered it was false — but, if Congress had relied on the department’s official talking points, we still wouldn’t know the truth today.”

Last month Holder also finally [admitted](#) to providing inaccurate testimony under oath — some critics of the administration called it “perjury” — before a House Committee investigating the scandal. He claimed, for example, that he had only found out about the deadly gun-running scheme “in the last few weeks.”

But on November 8, after the DOJ’s own documents exposed the lie, the U.S. government’s top law enforcement officer finally conceded that he had not told the truth. “In my testimony before the House committee, I did say ‘a few weeks.’ I probably could have said ‘a couple of months,’” Holder told the Senate Judiciary Committee on November 8. “I don’t think that what I said in terms of using the term ‘a few weeks’ was inaccurate, based on what happened.”

Incredibly, however, the Attorney General was still not being honest. In reality, Holder was bragging about the operation — which has been implicated in the murders of federal law enforcement officers such as [Border Patrol agent Brian Terry](#) and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent Jaime Zapata, along with hundreds of other victims — as far back as 2009.

“My department is committing 100 new ATF personnel to the Southwest border in the next 100 days to supplement our ongoing [Project Gunrunner](#),” Holder told a Mexican arms-trafficking conference in April of 2009 during a speech that is [still posted on the DOJ website](#). Gunrunner was the umbrella operation that [oversaw](#) Fast and Furious as well as other U.S. government gun-trafficking schemes until it was finally exposed.

More than 50 members of Congress so far — the list continues to grow — are [calling](#) for Holder to step down or be fired. And more than a few GOP presidential candidates including Rick Perry and Michele Bachmann have echoed the sentiment.

Powerful gun groups are calling for the Attorney General’s ouster, too. National Rifle Association chief Wayne LaPierre, for example, [argued](#) that Fast and Furious was a deliberate plot to undermine the God-given right to keep and bear arms protected by the Second Amendment.

But instead of tendering his resignation, Holder has gone on the offensive, [calling for more gun control](#) and lashing out at media outlets he believes are at least partially responsible for his woes. “You guys need to — you need to stop this,” the Attorney General [told](#) a reporter for *The Daily Caller* late last month when asked about the growing chorus in Congress demanding that he step down. “It’s not an organic thing that’s just happening. You guys are behind it.”

Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), the Chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee which is investigating Fast and Furious, has not yet added his name to the growing list. “The fact is it is not about any one person. It is not about Eric Holder,” Issa told the *Christian Science Monitor*, saying



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the problem is much bigger and that the investigation is still ongoing.

“It is about a failure that seems to be pervasive within [the Department of] Justice that investigations play fast and loose with the expectations of what is right or wrong when it comes to ... collateral damage,” Issa was quoted as saying. “This isn’t the first time the FBI and other agencies have been involved in investigations in which bad people are allowed to continue doing bad things in the name of going after bad people.”

Meanwhile, the ATF agents responsible for blowing the whistle on the deadly scheme [have suffered](#). The officials in charge of the program and the attempted cover-up, on the other hand, have [mostly been rewarded](#) with promotions and lucrative “transfers.”

It remains unclear exactly what the gun-running scheme was supposed to accomplish. DOJ and ATF claim the idea was to track the firearms and prosecute higher-ups. But critics don’t believe that excuse — especially because most of the guns were not even followed.

Groups such as the NRA have [said](#) it was likely an unlawful plot to undermine the gun rights of law-abiding Americans — and Holder’s continued insistence on more regulation has only added fuel to the fire. Other experts [contend](#) that Fast and Furious was part of a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operation to interfere in Mexican politics and the ongoing drug wars south of the border.

Photo of Attorney General Eric Holder

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