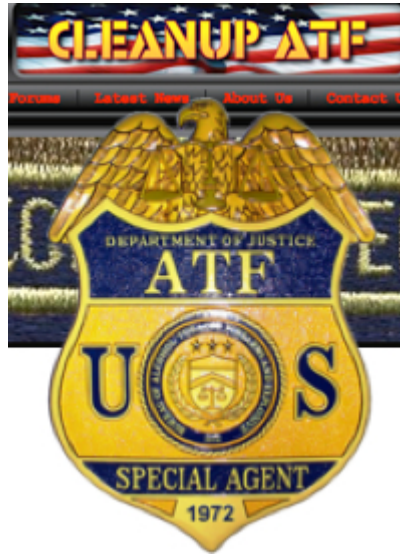




Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on June 28, 2011

## Project Gunrunner Whistleblower Faces Retribution

As federal officials face heat over their ineptitude in Project Gunrunner that was exposed by one whistleblower at the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives ( still known as ATF), they are in desperate search for a party to blame. Who better than the whistleblower himself? Fox News reports:



The agent, Vince Cefalu, who has spoken out about the ATF's so-called "Project Gunrunner" scandal, says he was served with termination papers just last week, and he calls the move politically motivated.

As Cefalu is the man who blew the whistle on the controversial Operation Fast and Furious headed by the ATF, there are certainly grounds for his assertions.

Operation Fast and Furious, a.k.a. [Project Gunrunner](#), was an operation of the ATF. Andrew Breitbart's BigGovernment.com wrote of it:

In late 2009, the ATF was alerted to suspicious buys at seven gun shops in the Phoenix area. Suspicious because the buyers paid cash, sometimes brought in paper bags. And they purchased classic "weapons of choice" used by Mexican drug traffickers — semi-automatic versions of military type rifles and pistols. According to news reports several gun shops wanted to stop the questionable sales, but the Bureau encouraged them to continue.

ATF managers allegedly made a controversial decision: Allow most of the weapons on the streets. The idea, they said, was to gather intelligence and see where the guns ended up. Insiders say it's a dangerous tactic called letting the guns "walk."

Predictably, the plan went very wrong, very quickly. In a report released by the House Oversight Committee, there were a number of negative findings related to Operation Fast and Furious:

- Agents expected to interdict weapons, yet were told to stand down and "just surveil." Agents therefore did not act. They watched straw purchasers buy hundreds of weapons illegally and transfer those weapons to unknown third parties and stash houses.
- ATF agents complained about the strategy of allowing guns to walk in Operation Fast and Furious. Leadership ignored their concerns. Instead, supervisors told the agents to "get with the program" because senior ATF officials had sanctioned the operation.
- Agents knew that given the large numbers of weapons being trafficked to Mexico, tragic results were a near certainty.
- Operation Fast and Furious contributed to the increasing violence and deaths in Mexico. This result was regarded with giddy optimism by ATF supervisors hoping that guns recovered at crime scenes in Mexico would provide the nexus to straw purchasers in Phoenix.
- In the same month wherein the ATF allowed gun smugglers to purchase 359 guns, 958 people died from gunfire in Mexico.



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Cefalu came to Fox News regarding the controversial operation in December, before reports about it became public in February. In December, Cefalu said, "Simply put, we knowingly let hundreds of guns and dozens of unidentified bad guys go across the border."

Fox News observes,

Since then, Cefalu's claims have been vindicated, as a number of agents with first-hand knowledge of the case came forward. The scandal over Project Gunrunner led to congressional hearings, a presidential reprimand — President Obama called the operation "a serious mistake" — and speculation that ATF chief Ken Melson will resign.

Last week, Cefalu was terminated from the agency after 24 years of service. The dismissed agent has engaged in a number of public appearances to discuss the scandal, reflecting his assertion that his termination letter was not unrelated to the role he played in exposing the scandal. "Aside from Jay Dobyns, I don't know of anyone that's been more vocal about ATF mismanagement than me. That's why this is happening."

Fox News says of the termination letter and previous issues Cefalu had with the agency:

The letter instead says that Cefalu should be fired because he leaked documents on a website he helped create, CleanupATF.org, and showed a "lack of candor" on past projects, in particular a 2005 operation that Cefalu led. Cefalu admits he made information about the case public but says he did so only after redacting sensitive parts and exhausting internal channels.

In the 2005 case, local police wanted to wiretap a suspect to gather evidence, but Cefalu objected, saying it would be illegal to use wiretaps until all other options for gathering evidence had been tried.

Cefalu was then removed from the case. But he continued to speak out and file internal complaints about what he viewed as illegal ATF wiretapping. And that's when his life became difficult.

"I had never had a disciplinary action in 18 years. Outstanding evaluations — above average — and on the 19th year, when I filed a complaint, I get my first unsatisfactory evaluation ever," said Cefalu.

Cefalu has even presented evidence of his assertions, revealing a 2005 evaluation letter to Fox News, wherein his supervisor, Dennis Downs, wrote, "Not only have you meet [sic] performance expectations, you have exceeded them."

Following Cefalu's complaints, his evaluation letters suddenly all became unsatisfactory, targeting a number of issues with Cefalu, ranging from his "foul language" and "smoking" to "hygiene."

Cefalu contends that his role in the Project Gunrunner scandal was likely the "last straw" for the higher-ups at the ATF. "I think it's obvious why they're doing this," he said. "It was my willingness to expose (Project Gunrunner) and support other people to come forward."

If Cefalu's contentions that he has been targeted as a whistleblower are correct, he would not be the first against whom the ATF apparently has retaliated for blowing the whistle. In fact, the organization has garnered a reputation for behaving in such a vindictive manner. According to Senator Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa), the ATF had an agent who had given Grassley's staff members information regarding the scandal. Once the ATF learned of this informant, the informant was accused by the agency of "misconduct."

Likewise, another agent at ATF, who wished to remain anonymous in fear of retribution, addressed the



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situation with Cefalu. “Common knowledge in the agency is that Cefalu outed an illegal wiretap quite some time ago, and he has been in the crosshairs since,” said the agent. “My impression of him is that he has probably ruffled lots of feathers and delicate egos in his time. He is very direct and honest.”

Attempting to pre-empt this treatment of Cefalu, Rep. Darrell Issa, chairman of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, sent a letter to the ATF warning them against retaliating against whistleblowers.

Unsurprisingly, the ATF denies any allegations of this nature. Spokesman Drew Wade told Fox News, “ATF will not comment on specific, ongoing personnel matters. It is illegal to use disciplinary actions to retaliate against employees, and ATF does not engage in such improper reprisals.”



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