



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on August 31, 2011

Shakeup Linked to ATF "Fast and Furious" Scandal

The reassignments appear to be an ongoing shakeup at ATF, where two assistant Special Agents in Charge of the operation, George Gillett and Jim Needles have previously been reassigned to other positions, CBS News reported.



"Fast and Furious" was reportedly designed to gather intelligence on gun sales as ATF agents observed sales of thousands of high-caliber weapons to alleged middlemen for drug cartels operating on both sides of the Mexican border. The guns were supposed to lead agents to the drug gangs, but at least 2,000 of the weapons were never accounted for, while others were recovered at a dozen crime scenes in the United States and undetermined number in Mexico. Two were found at the site where U.S. Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry was killed in a shootout near the Mexican border in December of last year.

The operation has become the subject of hearings in Congress, where ATF agents testified in committee that they had been repeatedly told to "stand down" when they wanted to intercept the weapons. Earlier this month, there was still more controversy over reports that three of the supervisors of the operation had been promoted to management positions at the bureau's headquarters in Washington. William McMahon, the agency's Deputy Director of Operations in the West at the time of the ill-fated sting operation, became Deputy Assistant Director of the Office of Professional Responsibility. William Newell, special agent in charge of field office for Arizona and New Mexico, was reassigned as Special Assistant to the Assistant Director of the agency's Office of Management. David Roth, who was an on-the-ground team supervisor of the sting operation, went to Washington as Branch Chief for the ATF's tobacco division. The moves brought sharp criticisms from congressional critics of ATF and of "Fast and Furious" in particular.

"Until Attorney General Holder and Justice Department officials come clean on all alleged gun-walking operations, including a detailed response to allegations of a Texas-based scheme, it is inconceivable to reward those who spearheaded this disastrous operation with cushy desks in Washington," said Senator John Cornyn (R- Texas), a member of the Judiciary Committee.

ATF spokesman Scot Thomasson denied the moves were promotions, saying the men were "laterally transferred" from operational duties into administrative roles. "These transfers/reassignments have never been described as promotions in any of the documents announcing them," Thomasson said at the time.

Acting Director Melson will be replaced by U.S. Attorney for Minnesota Todd Jones, who will continue



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in his present job while he runs ATF, Attorney General Holder announced Tuesday.

"As a seasoned prosecutor and former military judge advocate, U.S. Attorney Jones is a demonstrated leader who brings a wealth of experience to this position," Holder said. Burke, who was chief of staff to Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano when she was Governor of Arizona, said in a memo to his staff at the U.S. Attorney's office that it is time for him to move on. "My long tenure in public service has been intensely gratifying. It has also been intensely demanding. For me, it is the right time to move on to pursue other aspects of my career and my life and allow the office to move ahead," he wrote.

A senior Justice Department official said Holder had lost confidence in both men and decided that ATF needed "a fresh start," [NBC reported](#).

Rep. Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), Chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, welcomed the changes announced Tuesday, but said the committee's investigation of the gunwalking operation would continue. "While the reckless disregard for safety that took place in Operation Fast and Furious certainly merits changes within the Department of Justice, the Oversight and Government Reform Committee will continue its investigation to ensure that blame isn't offloaded on just a few individuals for a matter that involved much higher levels of the Justice Department," Issa said.

Sen. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, called for a full accounting from the Justice Department as to "who knew what and when, so we can be sure that this ill-advised strategy never happens again."

Photo of Kenneth Melson: AP Images

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