



Written by [Alex Newman](#) on April 19, 2011

Sen. Grassley: ATF Provided Guns to Cartels

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and the Department of Justice are under increasing pressure after getting caught providing misleading responses to Sen. Charles Grassley (R-Iowa, left), who is continuing to investigate a U.S. government operation that deliberately put high-powered weapons in the hands of Mexican cartels.

Two of those guns, AK47s, ended up being involved in the [murder](#) of Border Patrol agent Brian Terry last year, documents [show](#). And since January, Grassley has been trying to get answers. But so far, the DOJ is refusing to cooperate.



Responding to queries from the Senator's office about the so-called Project Gunrunner, Operation Fast and Furious, the Justice Department in February called the allegations "false." The DOJ's reply also stated that the ATF had not knowingly allowed weapons into the hands of criminal "straw-purchasers" buying guns for the cartels. But that simply isn't true, according to whistleblowers from within the ATF and documents obtained during the investigation.

Sen. Grassley obtained even more documentation from whistleblowers last week that appears to directly contradict statements made by DOJ attorneys. "Praise the Lord for whistleblowers," he [said](#) on the Senate floor last week. (See video below)

Among the new documents contained in a letter Grassley sent to Attorney General Eric Holder on April 13, for example, are copies of e-mails between the ATF and a gun-shop owner. The communications clearly show that the federally licensed dealer was being pressured by the ATF to sell weapons to known straw purchasers.

"The Justice Department's unwillingness to be forthcoming is troubling, and the more we learn from whistleblowers, the more it looks like the department will end up with egg on its face," Grassley said in a statement released last week. "Whistleblowers are still coming forward with more information disproving the department's only response to my inquiries."

In one of the e-mails obtained by Grassley, the firearms dealer specifically expresses concern that the guns the ATF was pressuring him to sell would end up in the hands of criminal gangs.

"I want to help ATF with its investigation but not at the risk of agents' safety because I have some very close friends that are U.S. Border Patrol agents in southern AZ," the gun dealer wrote in a letter to the Bureau. ATF and the U.S. Attorney's office repeatedly assured the dealer that "safeguards" were in place ensure that the guns did not end up in the possession of the Mexican cartels.

But tragically, a few months later - just as the gun dealer and lower-level ATF agents had feared - two of the ATF weapons [ended up](#) at the scene of Border Patrol agent Brian Terry's murder. Outraged



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whistleblowers within the ATF have been speaking out loudly since then, with one even going on CBS to [explain](#) what was going on. More recently, another provided the e-mail exchanges to Sen. Grassley.

“In light of this new evidence, the Justice Department’s claim that the ATF never knowingly sanctioned or allowed the sale of assault weapons to straw purchasers is simply not credible,” Grassley wrote in his letter to Holder. The Senator also asked if the DOJ still stood by its previous denial and asked if Holder would finally commit to providing the documents he’s been requesting.

On the Senate floor on April 14, Grassley blasted the ATF, too. “The ATF is supposed to stop criminals from trafficking guns to Mexican drug cartels, [but] was actually making that trafficking of arms easier for them,” he said (see video below). “That would be bad enough if it happened because of incompetence or turf battles, but it looks like the agency was doing this on purpose.” That’s what whistleblowers have said as well.

On top of that, the ATF was encouraging it, Grassley charged. “The government actually encouraged gun dealers to sell multiple firearms to known and suspected traffickers,” he asserted. “Two of those guns ended up at the scene of a murder of U.S. Border Patrol agent in Arizona. His name was Brian Terry, and his family deserves answers from their very own government.” The family has been very vocal about wanting the truth, too.

Grassley also complained that after eight letters to the DOJ, all he had received so far was one inaccurate denial. “Now, I’m going to do whatever it takes to get to the bottom of this,” he told the Senate. “It’s been nearly three months since I first raised this issue. It’s past time for the Justice Department to come clean.”

Grassley expressed concern about what the scandal meant to gun shops as well. Putting firearms dealers – who depend on federal permission to operate their businesses – in the position of knowingly assisting criminals is “completely unfair,” his office said in a press release.

“On the one hand, these gun dealers rely upon the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms for their license to even be able to be in business. So, of course, these [federally licensed gun sellers] want to cooperate with the government,” Grassley said in the statement. “When you have got this big club hanging over your head, will you be licensed or not licensed. On the other hand, the government asks these gun dealers to keep selling to the bad guys even after the dealers warned that it might end in tragedy.”

A spokesperson for the DOJ [insisted](#) that the ATF does try to stop weapons from crossing the border into Mexico. And Obama has since admitted on Spanish-language television that the ATF policy of arming criminals to try to catch them may have been misguided, according to a [transcript](#) provided by blogger Mike Vanderboegh, who played a key role in exposing the whole scandal. But so far, the DOJ and ATF have refused to comment on the most recent revelations.

Grassley is demanding written answers from the DOJ by April 20. It’s unclear whether the department plans to respond. But one thing is certain: This scandal will not be going away any time soon.



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