



Operation: Fast and Furious and Corresponding Investigations
(1/12/11)

Proposed Opening Statement

- The violence inflicted by the cartels on the citizens of Mexico has reached epidemic proportions. To think that this violence does not affect the United States is naïve; and Agent Terry's murder is a painful reminder of that fact. Illegally obtained firearms are the tools of the trade used by the cartels to protect their criminal enterprise and terrorize the public. Unlike the drugs that they supply, these illegal firearms can stay in circulation indefinitely and cause death and destruction for decades. It is the responsibility of the men and women of ATF to disrupt the flow of firearms to these criminals and protect the public from violent crime.

Statements

- In October 2009, ATF, in partnership with DEA, ICE, IRS, and the Phoenix Police Department, began an OCDETF investigation into a firearms trafficking organization funded by the violent Sinaloa Drug Trafficking Organization (DTO).
- This criminal organization is responsible for trafficking hundreds of firearms into Mexico, using firearms in furtherance of drug trafficking, drug smuggling, wire fraud, and bulk currency smuggling.
- From October 2009 through October 2010, this organization, through the use of numerous straw buyers, purchased approximately \$1.25 million in firearms from FFLs in the Phoenix area and trafficked the firearms into Mexico and other locations within the United States.
- During the course of this investigation, ATF and our law enforcement partners utilized a variety of investigative techniques to identify a large number of co-conspirators and disrupt the illegal activities of this criminal enterprise by seizing hundreds of firearms and narcotics.

Questions and Answers

- **Some media reports, referencing an anonymous ATF official, claim that ATF knowingly “walked” about 1,900 firearms across the U.S.-Mexico border as part of this operation. What can you tell me about that?**

Or

- **The news release/indictment indicates that ATF waited until nearly 2,000 guns were illegally purchased before arresting the straw buyers in this case. Why did ATF wait so long?**

ANSWER: It’s not against the law for an individual to purchase 10, 20 or 50 or even 100 guns at one time. It’s not illegal to own or possess hundreds of guns; however, it is illegal to straw purchase firearms for those who cannot possess them legally. Operation Fast and Furious became a long-term investigation because of the amount of time it took to gather enough evidence against those who were supplying these violent criminals with the tools of their trade. We needed to ensure that when we did arrest these individuals, justice would be served.

ANSWER: Knowing what it takes to prosecute these types of federal violations is the best way to understand why this investigation took as long as it did and utilized so many resources. Investigations of this type are often long and complicated due to the fact that firearms are a legal commodity being diverted for illegal use. When conducting these investigations we have found that the end user of often shrouded by many layers of straw purchasers and middlemen whose sole purpose is to hide the connection between the first retail purchaser and the violent criminal. Determining when the firearm leaves legal commerce can be extremely difficult and therefore hard to prove.

- **Border Patrol Agent Brian A. Terry was shot and killed after he and his team encountered several suspects near Rio Rico, Ariz. At least four suspects are in custody while one is still being pursued. Was a gun trafficked in this case used in the murder?**

Or

- **We understand that a firearm bought in connection with this ATF investigation was used to murder Border Patrol Agent Brian A. Terry. Can you please comment on this information?**

ANSWER: The death of Agent Terry is tragic and is a sad and dark day for all of law enforcement. We’ve lost one of our own. This is another example of the dangers faced by law enforcement every day across this country when pursuing these violent criminals.

ANSWER: Agent Terry's death is the exact reason why we must continue going after those who are determined to destroy the lives of so many innocent individuals in our communities by plying their illicit trade. For those who would say it is Mexico's problem, I say Agent Terry's death and all of those who have perished because of this violence prove that this challenge belongs to everyone.

ANSWER: The investigation into the murder of Agent Terry is active and ongoing. ATF has pledged its support and resources to bring to justice the perpetrators who are guilty of that crime. I won't say anything here today to jeopardize that investigation or the subsequent prosecution of those responsible for this terrible crime.

ANSWER: The murder of Agent Terry is a tragic loss that has been felt throughout the United States and underscores the dangers that law enforcement officers face every day. As the investigation continues into this heinous crime, our hearts go out to Agent Terry's family and his fellow Border Patrol Agents who continue to risk their lives to protect the citizens of our great Country.

- **Today ATF agents arrested 20 individuals in this investigation. What kind of impact will that make on the Sinaloa Cartel?**

ANSWER: We hope the arrests have a crippling effect on the cartel's supply line for guns. The Project Gunrunner initiative is designed to stem the flow of firearms to Mexico drug trafficking organizations.

ANSWER: This complex source of firearms has dried up thanks to the work of ATF and our law enforcement partners, unfortunately there are many more firearms trafficking rings and we are in the process of identifying and investigating other organizations employed by cartels in America.

ANSWER: The hard work of all the people involved in this investigation has denied the tools of trade to this violent criminal organization, minimizing their ability to terrorize communities on both sides of the border.

- **Historically, straw buyers who are prosecuted rarely get time. If they do, it's only a year or two. What impact do you expect to have by indicting these 20 straw buyers?**

ANSWER: Criminals who want guns or traffic in guns seek people with clean criminal records to purchase firearms on their behalf. That is against the law. With convictions, these 20 individuals will no longer be able to supply tools of the trade to criminals.

ANSWER: To deter would-be criminals and to send a message that trafficking firearms is a crime that will impact them for the rest of their lives. Simply put, crime doesn't pay.

ANSWER: To send a message to drug cartels that ATF and its law enforcement partners will use all enforcement methods available to disrupt and dismantle their criminal activities.

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