

Chairman Chaffetz Opening Statement

"Fast and Furious, Six Years Later"

Chairman Jason Chaffetz (R-UT):



Remarks as Prepared:

Today we are here to check in on one of the longest running congressional oversight and investigative matters of our time, Operation Fast and Furious. Congress is now in its seventh year in search of a complete accounting of the facts relating to the reckless gun trafficking operation that left border patrol agent Brian Terry murdered. At the scene of Agent Terry's murder in 2010, two modified AK-47 type assault rifles were recovered. The weapons traced to Operation Fast and Furious.

The strategy of this failed operation, encouraged by the Department of Justice, was to focus the resources of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms on Mexican drug cartels rather than low-level straw gun purchasers. As such, a program was born that allowed straw buyers to supply Mexican drug cartels with firearms. Purchasing a firearm for someone other than yourself is illegal. The shocking end-game of this misguided plan was to identify cartel members after guns recovered at crime scenes traced back to their original place of purchase.

Absent from this strategy was *any* modicum of public safety. ATF failed in its mission to protect our communities from violent criminals and the illegal use and trafficking of firearms. Let's keep in mind, these were nearly 2,000 firearms that they knowingly and willingly let out onto the streets. Agent Terry's family shouldn't have to wait more than 6 years for answers and accountability. We are grateful they are here with us today to tell their story again and they're our second panel.

Our committee began its work in February of 2011 under the leadership of Chairman Darrell Issa, after partnering with Senator Grassley to evaluate unfathomable whistleblower accounts and documents coming out of ATF in Phoenix, Arizona. Both Chairman Grassley and Chairman Issa helped lead the charge, and we're very grateful for their efforts and look forward to hearing more from both today.

Several Phoenix-based ATF special agents expressed skepticism and disbelief about the program as it went against everything they were trained to do, and violated their law enforcement oath to protect the public. Special Agent John Dodson, who is with us today, was one of those agents. Without John Dodson's determination to do the right thing, surely many more thousands of firearms would have walked, leading to additional deaths. He should be thanked - by the Justice Department, by ATF, and by all of us. Agent Dodson will tell us today a different story, however. His employer has not treated him as a hero. As the Committee with responsibility for oversight of federal whistleblower policy, we must continue to shine the light on John Dodson's story.

The congressional investigation also led to a well-chronicled impasse between two equal branches of government. In June 2012, the House of Representative held former Attorney General Eric Holder in contempt for failing to turn over documents relating to the investigation. The House successfully compelled the production of many of these documents in federal court. In two separate judicial victories, the Committee received approximately 80,000 pages of new documents from DOJ. However, it should not take years and endless, expensive litigation for the executive branch to cooperate with proper congressional oversight. We still require additional documents, and litigation is ongoing as DOJ continues its unprecedented stonewalling of Congress and the Terry family.

In previous testimony before Congress, former Attorney General Holder committed to getting the Terry Family the answers and explanation they needed. But, when the television lights went off, that did not happen. In fact, the opposite occurred. The Obama Administration Justice Department went so far as to litigate against the Terry Family. The Justice Department wrote briefs and argued in federal court against the family's efforts to intervene as a crime victim in the Fast and Furious prosecutions. This is a travesty of justice.

I look forward to hearing from Senator Grassley, Special Agent Dodson, and members of Brian Terry's family, his mother, and his cousin Robert Heyer. We look forward to hearing their accounts and perspectives from a vantage point of six years later. With that, I yield to the Ranking Member.