

Many concerned Nebraskans have written me recently regarding a "gun-walking" scandal on the Mexican border involving the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (BATFE, also known as ATF), a division of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ). The operation, known as "Operation Fast and Furious," has drawn intense scrutiny from Congress.

Fast and Furious was an ATF operation lasting from 2009 to early 2011. Its premise was to permit high-powered firearms to "walk," or leave, gunshops in Arizona by the way of certain arms traffickers who had been identified by ATF. The Bureau would then track these "straw buyers" to key figures in Mexican drug cartels, allowing agents to build conspiracy cases, make arrests, and put a large dent in gun smuggling efforts across the U.S.-Mexico border.

The plan faltered, however, as traffickers moved into Mexico and ATF officials lost track of many of the more than 2,000 guns purchased in Arizona. Hundreds of firearms disappeared into drug cartel gun stockpiles, and some of the weapons began appearing at murder scenes. In December 2010, a gunfight in an Arizona border canyon left U.S. Border Agent Brian Terry dead, and found near his body were two firearms purchased under Fast and Furious. The Attorney General of Mexico has said that 200 Mexican deaths have been traced back to Fast and Furious guns. On October 31, 2011, a top Department of Justice (DOJ) official, Assistant Attorney General Lanny Bruer, admitted he made a "mistake" in "not alert[ing] others within the leadership of the Department of Justice" about the "pattern of unacceptable and misguided tactics used by the ATF."

Earlier this year, the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee and the Senate Judiciary Committee began investigations into Fast and Furious. Some ATF agents questioned the Fast and Furious plan from the beginning, suspecting it would ultimately lead to tragic results. "These guns weren't going for a positive cause, they were going for a negative cause," ATF attaché Carlos Canino told the Oversight Committee during a summer hearing. "The ATF armed the Sinaloa cartel. It's disgusting." Concerned agents, according to the report, were told by supervisors to "get with the program" and allow the guns to leave, as these were the orders of senior ATF officials.

The Oversight Committee has since turned focus on how much DOJ officials knew about Fast and Furious and when they knew it. Attorney General Eric Holder testified in a May 3, 2011, Judiciary Committee hearing: "I'm not sure of the exact date, but I probably heard about Fast and Furious for the first time over the last few weeks." CBS News reported last month, though, that it obtained documents showing that Holder had been briefed by his DOJ staff on Fast and

Furious as far back as July 2010.

It is also important to note that there was an earlier version of Fast and Furious during the previous Administration in 2006 called "Operation Wide Receiver." This program had similar intent (apparently with tighter controls, however). In 2007, it was terminated.

Many Americans, including many Nebraskans who are responsible gun owners, are increasingly concerned about the carelessness of the ATF allowing dangerous weapons to fall into criminal hands on the government's watch. "It is your responsibility," the chairman of the House Oversight committee wrote to Attorney General Eric Holder in an October 10 letter. "Operation Fast and Furious was the Department's most significant gun trafficking case. It related to two of your major initiatives – destroying the Mexican cartels and reducing gun violence on both sides of the border. On your watch, it went spectacularly wrong. Whether you realize yet or not, you own Fast and Furious."

Rather than making progress on securing the tumultuous border with Mexico, this operation made conditions worse and more dangerous, harming our own agents. When things go wrong, as they did in Fast and Furious, it is fully appropriate that Congress investigate why in order to ensure the integrity of our nation's public policies. [Click here](#) to view the congressional report in its entirety.