

May 2, 2011

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley  
Ranking Member  
Committee on the Judiciary  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Grassley:

This responds to your letter of April 13, 2011, referencing the allegations you have raised about the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives' (ATF's) Project Gunrunner and Operation Fast and Furious, and requesting that the Senate Judiciary Committee receive access to the ATF documents reviewed by the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform.

You have asked whether it remains our view that "ATF did not sanction or otherwise knowingly allow the sale of assault weapons to straw purchasers." In fact, my letter, dated February 4, 2011 said: "At the outset, the allegation described in your January 27 letter – that ATF 'sanctioned' or otherwise knowingly allowed the sale of assault weapons to a straw purchaser who then transported them into Mexico – is false." It remains our understanding that ATF's Operation Fast and Furious did not knowingly permit straw buyers to take guns into Mexico. You have provided to us documents, including internal ATF emails, which you believe support your allegation. As you know, we have referred these documents and all correspondence and materials received from you related to Operation Fast and Furious to the Acting Inspector General, so that she may conduct a thorough review and resolve your allegations. While we await her findings, the Attorney General has made clear to prosecutors and agents working along the Southwest Border that the Department should never knowingly permit firearms to cross the border.

Your letter also asks whether the Department will provide the Senate Judiciary Committee with access to the documents made available to the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. While we appreciate your interest in this matter, the Executive Branch over many Administrations has taken the position that only a chairman can speak for a committee in conducting oversight and we work to accommodate legitimate oversight needs of congressional committees as articulated in letter requests from chairmen. The Department's responses to such requests are sent to both the chairman and the ranking member, and documents made available in response to a chairman's request may be reviewed by all members and staff on that committee. As we explained in our April 18, 2011 letter to Chairman Leahy, a copy of which was provided to you, there are ongoing criminal investigations in Arizona, as well as an indicted criminal case set for trial in June in which 20 people have been charged with gun trafficking, drug trafficking and money laundering crimes. We have received no further requests from Chairman Leahy.

We recognize the importance of congressional oversight and have continued to be as responsive as possible to Chairman Issa without jeopardizing important law enforcement efforts

that are directed at stemming the violence in the United States and Mexico emanating from the drug cartels in Mexico. We are confident you understand the critical need of the Department to protect the pending criminal trial and ongoing investigation of alleged gun traffickers, drug traffickers, and money launderers along the Southwest Border.

We hope that this information is helpful. Please do not hesitate to contact this office if we can provide additional assistance regarding this or any other matter.

Sincerely,

Ronald Weich  
Assistant Attorney General

cc: The Honorable Patrick Leahy  
Chairman