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Sent: 7/20/2011 3:20:44 PM
Subject: from fox news: Operation Fast and Furious: The Straw Buyers

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Sent: Wednesday, July 20, 2011 11:59 AM
To: Cunningham, Patrick (USAAZ)
Subject: FW: from fox news: Operation Fast and Furious: The Straw Buyers

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Operation Fast and Furious: The Straw Buyers

By William La Jeunesse

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When the Operation Fast and Furious indictment was announced back in January, it was depicted as a big bust. Twenty suspects were charged with numerous counts of conspiracy, money laundering, gun running and drug trafficking. The defendants faced 5 to 20 years on a single count.

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives(ATF) along with the U.S. Attorney's office in Phoenix claimed to have dismantled a major weapons trafficking organization from top to bottom- from the end user of the weapons in Mexico to the money men, those who smuggled and transported the weapons from the U.S. into Mexico, and the buyers on our side of the border.

Yet after thousands of man hours and millions of dollars spent, only one of the 20 suspects remains behind bars. Most were released within 24 hours of their arrest. In the end, all prosecutors got was one middle man and a handful of straw buyers.

Fox News paid a visit to some of the straw buyers in the Phoenix Metro area last week. What we found were young men, many living with their parents, who were apparently just looking to make some quick money.

"A straw buyer is usually a kid who is 18-25, who needs a couple hundred extra bucks and knows somebody who knows somebody that has a way to make a couple extra bucks," said Adrian Fontes, an attorney for the accused ringleader of this Operation. His client, Manuel Celis- Acosta is the only one still in jail.

"The government wants a dramatic indictment, they want the conspiracy to sound like it's run out by

highly sophisticated individuals who are involved with a particularly nefarious organization when the reality is it's just a bunch of kids," said Fontes.

Those "kids" purchased more than 1800 guns from stores in and around Phoenix. The straw buyers reportedly received about \$100 per transaction. The gun stores say they were assured by the ATF and U.S. attorneys that the weapons would be tracked. Instead, agents say the weapons were allowed to "walk", they were not followed and many ended up in Mexico. Along with crime scenes south of the border, two were also found at the murder scene of U.S. Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry.

Former U.S. Attorney Melvin McDonald says the defendants' release suggests that Operation Fast and Furious is not only a scandal, it was a failure.

" It's pretty scary," says McDonald. " You'd think a lot of people probably would not get out , they'd be detained because of the risk."

The parents of some of the straw buyers claim their sons just got caught up with the wrong crowd.

The mother of 18-year old Dejan Hercegovac, who bought more than 30 guns, said, "He didn't know anything.. he was just a kid."

The father of Erick Avila- Davila, a 25-year old who bought 12 guns, said he didn't know what his son was up to and only found out when he was arrested.

" When I ask him what he did, he just told me 'I'm sorry dad'."

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Read more: <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2011/07/20/operation-fast-and-furious-straw-buyers/#ixzz1SfO0YkMD>

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