
From: Weich, Ron (OLA)
To: Burton, Faith (OLA); Colborn, Paul P (OLC)
Sent: 9/7/2011 5:41:12 PM
Subject: FW: AG remarks - transcript

FYI.

From: Schmalzer, Tracy (OPA)
Sent: Wednesday, September 07, 2011 5:38 PM
To: Reich, Steven (ODAG); Weich, Ron (OLA); Axelrod, Matthew (ODAG); Richardson, Margaret (OAG); Grindler, Gary (OAG); Goldberg, Stuart (ODAG); O'Neil, David (ODAG); Delery, Stuart F. (OAG)
Subject: AG remarks - transcript

Q: Mr. Attorney General, last week you announced a leadership change at the ATF. Can you tell us why you chose that time to announce it given the ongoing -- (inaudible) -- probe and the congressional inquiry? Do you feel like -- what was your reason for that?

ATTY GEN. HOLDER: Well, the change was made to -- with the best interests of ATF at heart. (Inaudible) -- made the determination that a leadership change was appropriate in order to allow the men and women at ATF to focus on their critical public safety mission and to make sure that we had the leadership in place that would be helpful in that regard. Todd Jones is a person I've known for a good number of years. He's been a great United States attorney, a great assistant United States attorney, and I think he will bring wonderful leadership to the ATF. I spoke to Ken Nelson about the need for the change, and he agreed with me.

Q: Why was he reassigned instead of -- (inaudible)?

ATTY GEN. HOLDER: Well, Ken, I think, has been -- has served this department well over the course of some three decades. He has a particular expertise in the forensic area, and he was reassigned so that we could take advantage of that expertise.

Q: Congressman Issa says that he wants to get to the bottom of who else at the Justice Department approved that botched operation. Do you know who else at the Justice Department approved that botched operation? And what's going to happen to them?

ATTY GEN. HOLDER: Well, I mean, one of the things that we have ongoing is an inspector general investigation. And we'll certainly see, I think, at the end of that exactly who was involved, exactly who made the decisions in what was clearly, I think, a flawed enforcement effort. But the notion that somehow or other that this thing reaches into the upper levels of the Justice Department is something that at this point I don't think is supported by the facts. And I think as we examine and as all the facts are in fact revealed, we'll see that that is not the case.

We are cooperating with the investigation. We have made people available for interviews. We have turned over documents. We have conducted briefings. And our hope is that we will get to the conclusion of this investigation and the congressional effort as well relatively soon, so that we can finally say with some purpose and with some degree of certainty, and without any kind of political considerations, exactly what happened and who made the calls.

Q: Do you have any estimation about when the investigation's going to be finished?

ATTY GEN. HOLDER: Those are always kind of hard things to decide. The IG is working on this, I think very diligently. I can't say how long it's going to take, and I have no sense of how long the congressional investigation will take.

STAFF: We'll take one more question.

Q: Do you know --

Q: Republicans on the Hill say that while the investigation may not have reached into the upper echelons of the Justice Department, the upper echelons should have known about it, as leaders of the department. What do you say about that?

ATTY GEN. HOLDER: There are an awful lot of things that go on in the Justice Department. There are Operation Fast and Furious -- I'm sure there are Operation -- fill in the blank -- going on right now that people here in the department are not aware of. We put down -- one of the things that I have tried to do as attorney general is to place in the field the responsibility and the discretion for enforcement activities, setting broad parameters here in the

department, with the expectation that those parameters would be followed and filled in by specific enforcement actions. And the people, the men and women in the field, do a great job.

You know, it is -- (chuckles) -- it's kind of something that I think certain members of Congress would like to see, the notion that somehow or other high-level people in the department were involved. As I said, I don't think that is going to be shown to be the case.

Which doesn't mean that the mistakes were not serious. I took very seriously the allegations that were raised and asked the inspector general to conduct an investigation. And we have looked through emails, we have looked through a whole variety of things to try to determine what happened.

And so it'll be interesting to see what the -- what the IG comes up with.

My hope would be that Congress will conduct an investigation that is factually based and not mired with politics.

STAFF: Thank you.