GUS M. BILIRAKIS
9TH DISTRICT, FLORIDA

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
CHAIRMAN, SUBCOMMITTEE ON
EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS, RESPONSE AND
COMMUNICATIONS

COMMITTEE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
VICE-CHAIRMAN

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

CHAIRMAN, TASK FORCE ON VETERANS' AFFAIRS
REPUBLICAN POLICY COMMITTEE

ASSISTANT REPUBLICAN WHIP

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515–0909

WASHINGTON OFFICE:
☐ 407 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515–0909
(202) 225–5755

DISTRICT OFFICES:
☐ 35111 U.S. HIGHWAY 19 NORTH
PALM HARBOR PROFESSIONAL CENTER
SUITE 301
PALM HARBOR, FL 34684
(727) 773–2871

☐ 110 WEST REYNOLDS STREET
SUITE 101
PLANT CITY, FL 33563
(813) 752–9849

July 12, 2011

Mr. Eric H. Holder, Jr.
Attorney General
Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20530

Mr. Kenneth E. Melson
Acting Director
Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives
99 New York Avenue NE
Washington, DC 20226

Dear Attorney General Holder and Director Melson:

I am writing to share my deep concern about reports that the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) have participated in multiple acts of "gun walking," purposely allowing firearms to pass from straw purchasers into the possession of criminals and other dangerous third party organizations. These reports raise troubling questions about the motives, intentions, and competency of the ATF and the DOJ.

The ATF has noted that illegal weapons trafficking is a "problem with consequences on both sides" of our border, and that ATF's objective should be to prevent dangerous foreign groups and organizations from obtaining firearms "which they employ to murder rival drug traffickers, civilians, as well as political, military, and law enforcement figures in order to strengthen their grip on the lucrative drug and firearms routes into and out of the United States." However, two weapons found at the scene of the murder of U.S. Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry were traced back to the ATF's "Operation Fast and Furious" – a gun walking operation conducted by the ATF's Phoenix Field Division. This evidence suggests that the federal government has severely failed the very objective it proposed for Project Gunrunner, the ATF's comprehensive strategy to reduce violent crime associated with foreign criminal organizations.

In recent days, it has come to light that the ATF and DOJ may have participated in the act of "gun walking" beyond the acts conducted within the scope of "Operation Fast and Furious." Recent reports have suggested that Project Gunrunner may not have been limited to weapons trafficking to Mexico and that similar programs included the possible trafficking of arms to dangerous criminal gangs in Honduras with the knowledge of the ATF's Tampa Field Division

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

and the Department of Justice's Middle District of Florida through an operation known as "Operation Castaway."

As a member of the House Committee on Homeland Security and a member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, I find it troubling that the United States government would willfully allow weapons to be acquired by dangerous criminal and drug trafficking organizations, in direct contravention to our strategic and national interests.

I would therefore appreciate your answers to the following questions:

1. Can you confirm whether or not the ATF Tampa Field Division and/or the Department of Justice's Middle District of Florida participated in a "gun walking" scheme that allowed weapons to be trafficked to Honduras?
2. If so, does the ATF or the DOJ have knowledge of any of these firearms ending up in the possession of the notorious MS-13 gang?
3. How many guns have been allowed to pass into Honduras and how many have since been accounted for?
4. Were trafficked weapons subject to any special monitoring processes once they left the United States?
5. Has "Operation Castaway" been terminated? If not, does the DOJ or the ATF plan to terminate this program or urge its termination?
6. Has the DOJ or the ATF established any criteria or guidance pertaining to what is admissible for future operations aimed at preventing firearms from being obtained and used by dangerous foreign criminal organizations in crimes similar to the murder of U.S. Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry?

It is my belief that the ATF and the DOJ operated in an extremely misguided manner in allowing guns to walk across the border and end up in the possession of dangerous criminal organizations. These actions have already resulted in the loss of human life and property. I hope that you would agree that we must not allow flawed programs to continue to operate to the detriment of the safety and security of the United States of America.

In that regard, I look forward to receiving your answers to these questions in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

GUS M. BILIRAKS
Member of Congress