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Fast, and Really Furious

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Fast, and Really Furious

By Jo Ann Emerson

When the Bureau of Alcohol, Firearms, Tobacco and Explosives (ATF) chose a name for its new border operation in 2009, they ripped it from blockbuster movie posters, calling it “Fast and Furious.” Well, the way they conducted this operation really ought to make Americans furious about the lack of controls and responsibility used in planning this action of the federal government.

Here was the idea: federal agents would sell guns to suspected and known traffickers, who would take the contraband across the border into Mexico where they knew the firearms would most likely be purchased and maybe even used by criminals in another country. Used they were, as more than 2,000 guns were sold as part of the operation, becoming part of a million-dollar illicit arms trade over the southern U.S. border.

For years, ATF lost track of the guns they had let go. Some of them were used in the commission of violent crimes in Mexico, including more than a few murders. The officials at the highest levels who approved this idea lost sight of a very important goal. They failed to keep the safety of American citizens, Mexican citizens, and the U.S. agents working along the border as their highest priority. The flaws in their plan ought to be clear to anyone who was part of Operation Fast and Furious. The guns disappeared into the night, over the border, on their way through and to some of the most violent gangs in the continent.

The safeguards of responsible gun ownership in the U.S. were exchanged for a knowing

transaction with a criminal element, a complete contradiction of the system we use to protect our Second Amendment rights.

The coming weeks will hopefully bring those responsible for the mission to account. At ATF and the U.S. Department of Justice, there is the sense that more is known about the mission than is being shared with the American public and with Congress.

In the meantime, Americans should notice an important truth in all this: I know I have. Illegal traffic over the southern border of the U.S. runs in two directions. Illegal aliens and drugs enter our country through a porous border, and money and guns often travel the other direction. Both black markets are dangerous to our national security, as well as our families' security.

Securing the border is imperative because it will stop illegal trade and trafficking in both directions. This is an activity federal agencies should be bent on stopping with clear enforcement actions, not imperfect plans like this one.

Operation Fast and Furious is also Frustrating, mainly because the laws we have in place would go a long way to stopping illegal border crossings and trafficking in people and firearms. Until those laws are truly and aggressively enforced, however, we will be left with inferior ideas to target criminals. Giving guns to people who break the laws for a living and then losing track of them should not strike anyone as a better way to get at the heart of the problem. It can be much better addressed with border security, fences, and surveillance of the back doors to our nation.

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