

Grassley Disputes Firearms Figures from the ATF

Written by Grassley Press

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WASHINGTON – Senator Chuck Grassley today said that firearms data released last week by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) was a selective release of certain statistical data that inaccurately reflects the scope and source of the problem of firearms in Mexico and the drug trafficking organization violence.

Grassley's letter to ATF Acting Director Kenneth Melson cited additional statistical breakdowns and a Department of State cable that dispels myths about the source of weapons trafficked to Mexico. The unclassified cable includes sections such as: "Myth: An Iron Highway of Weapons Flows from the U.S." and "Myth: The DTOs (Drug Trafficking Organizations) are Mostly Responsible."

Grassley said when looking at a breakdown of the numbers, it's clearly inaccurate to assert that 70 percent of the guns recovered in Mexico can be traced to a United States based gun dealer.

Grassley cited additional statistics in his letter to Melson. In the letter, Grassley said that by looking at more specific data provided to his office, it was clear that of the 26,813 weapons traced in 2009, only 5,800 actually traced back to Federal Firearms Licensees.

"The implication made by the ATF and various press reports is that the firearms come directly from U.S. manufacturers or U.S. Federal Firearms Licensees selling guns to drug trafficking organizations. Not only does this paint a grossly inaccurate picture of the situation, but it

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appears that the State Department disagrees with this portrayal,” Grassley said.

In his letter, Grassley provides a further break down of data of firearms tracing information, including a catchall category called “No Final Sale Dealer” in the ATF’s own eTrace system, which means the firearms did not trace back to a Federal Firearms Licensee. Astonishingly, nearly 78 percent of firearms traced in 2009 and 66 percent of firearms traced in 2010 were not traced to a United States licensed gun dealer. Grassley points out that these guns instead are likely sold to foreign countries or militaries requiring approval of the State Department and Homeland Security.

To make matters worse, this category includes firearms in the ATF’s Suspect Gun Database – a category which would include the nearly 2,000 firearms that are known to be part of the ATF’s ill-advised Fast and Furious strategy where the ATF knowingly authorized firearm sales to straw purchasers before the weapons were trafficked to Mexican drug trafficking organizations.

“The ATF needed a distraction before last week’s hearing. Unfortunately, nobody looked closely at the numbers to determine that this was a very selective release of information intended to distract people from the disastrous policy to let guns fall into the hands of straw purchasers, only to be often found on the other side of the border,” Grassley said.

Grassley has led the oversight efforts into the ATF’s reckless strategy to allow guns to fall into the hands of straw purchasers. He began his investigation in January and has yet to receive any substantive information from the Justice Department and the ATF. Grassley has been joined by Congressman Darrell Issa, the Chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, to investigate Operation Fast and Furious.

A copy of the text of the letter can be found below. [A signed copy of the letter can be found by clicking here](#)