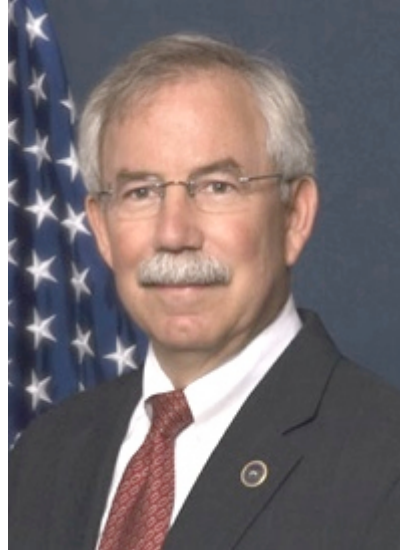




Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on September 5, 2011

## White House Was Briefed About “Fast and Furious” Gunwalker Scandal

At least three White House officials received email updates on “Operation Fast and Furious,” a gun-walker scandal that saw the transfer of some 2,000 weapons into the hands of the Mexican-based Sinaloa drug cartel. CBS News’ Sharyl Attkisson reported September 2 that “three White House officials were briefed on gun trafficking efforts that included Fast and Furious. The officials are Kevin O’Reilly, then-director of North American Affairs, now assigned to the State Department; Dan Restrepo, senior Latin American advisory; and Greg Gatjanis, a national security official.”



The three White House officials being advised on the progress of the botched transfer were in addition to the top leadership of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms. Both Acting Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF) Kenneth Melson (photo above) and U.S. District Attorney for Phoenix Dennis K. Burke resigned their positions over “Operation Fast and Furious” August 30. The operation was not merely responsible for the transfer of more than 2,000 guns to the Mexican-based Sinaloa drug cartel, but many of the weapons were high-powered weapons such as AK-47s, AR-15s and two different models of .50 caliber armor-piercing sniper weapons with a kill range of over a mile.

The ATF supposedly transferred the guns to the drug gang beginning in November 2009 to set up a sting that would enable the prosecution of the gang’s drug lords, but the ATF lost track of all the guns and to date there have been no high-level prosecutions of drug kingpins related to the gun transfers. But the guns have been traced to the site of a dozen violent crimes in the United States and hundreds of violent crimes in Mexico. Among the U.S. crimes related to the “gun walking” scandal was the shooting death of U.S. Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry. The program shut down after negative publicity over Terry’s death in December 2010.

President Obama [promised](#) June 29 that, “As soon as the investigation is completed, I think appropriate actions will be taken.”

The ATF announced August 30 that U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota B. Todd Jones would take over as acting ATF Director: “U.S. Attorney for the District of Minnesota B. Todd Jones to serve as Acting Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and ATF Acting Director Kenneth Melson to become Senior Advisor on forensic science in the Office of Legal Policy (OLP).”

The other political victim of the gun walker scandal was U.S. District Attorney for Phoenix Dennis K. Burke. Burke [resigned](#) the same day as Melson, August 30. The U.S. Attorney’s office had a role in the botched gun sting, as part of a joint task force under which the operation was managed. Burke’s top



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aide was also reassigned. The U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency also [had a role in Fast and Furious](#).

Melson's demotion was the first major sacking related to the scandal. Other officials involved in the day-to-day operations suffered no career consequences for the gun-walking scandal. After the *Los Angeles Times* [reported](#) that three of the leaders of Fast and Furious — William G. McMahon, William D. Newell and David Voth — had been promoted to the Washington headquarters on August 16, the ATF countered what it termed "inaccurate" reporting and called the move to headquarters a "lateral transfer."

The Phoenix office Newell headed directs ATF operations in Arizona and New Mexico, while McMahon was the head of operations for the ATF in the entire western half of the nation. The ATF claimed in an August 17 press release that the three "were laterally transferred from operational positions and moved into administrative roles, they were not promoted. They did not receive salary or grade increases nor did they assume positions with greater responsibility." Newell, the agent in charge of the Phoenix office "reassigned to the Office of Management to assist with the [Office of the Inspector General] investigation and congressional inquiry."

The ATF "lateral transfer" and explanation troubled some congressional investigators, however. "The Justice Department is trying to explain to us that it was a lateral move and they aren't getting more money and so it really wasn't a promotion," Senator Charles Grassley [told](#) NewsMax August 16, "But I think it is a move to keep them quiet."

*Photo: Kenneth Melson*

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