



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on October 12, 2011

## Holder, Issa Spar Over “Fast and Furious”

The controversy surrounding the disastrous Operation Fast and Furious (part of Project Gunrunner) has prompted a congressional investigation which is quickly heating up as more facts emerge. The investigation has led Congress to question Attorney General Eric Holder as to how much he knew of the operation, and how long he was sitting on the knowledge that known Mexican drug cartel members were permitted by the officials of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (still known as ATF) to walk with weapons provided by the ATF. The inquiry has resulted in an exchange of scathing letters between Holder and the investigation head, House Oversight Committee Chairman Darrell Issa (R-Calif., left).



Operation Fast and Furious was launched in 2009 in an effort to target major gunrunners. The stated plan was to follow gun purchasers in the hopes that the suspects would lead the ATF to major heads of Mexican cartels. Unfortunately, some of those same deadly weapons were found at crime scenes in both Mexico and the United States, and were involved in the murder of Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry last year.

Attorney General Holder has done his best to distance himself from the failed gunwalking operation. However, one week ago, Senator Charles Grassley (R-Iowa), a ranking Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, distributed five separate memos from July and August of 2010 addressed to Holder, which cite Operation Fast and Furious by name. The documents implicate Holder, proving he likely knew about the program for at least a year.

Republicans contend that memos prove what they have been saying all along: that Holder was aware of Operation Fast and Furious sooner than he indicated. The accusations prompted the Attorney General to ventilate in a scathing letter to Issa and other Republicans, accusing them of “irresponsible and inflammatory rhetoric.”

In his letter, Holder [insisted](#):

I have no recollection of knowing about "Fast and Furious" or of hearing its name prior to the public controversy about it. Prior to early 2011, I certainly never knew about the tactics employed in the operation.

Issa contends, however, that after the release of the memos last week, Holder’s assertions are simply unbelievable. According to Issa, Holder “has failed to give Congress and the American people an honest account of what he and others knew about gun-walking and Operation Fast and Furious.” Issa called Holder’s lack of honesty “deeply disturbing.”



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"If Attorney General Holder had said these things five months ago when Congress asked him about 'Operation Fast and Furious,' it might have been more believable," House Oversight Committee spokesman Frederick Hill remarked, adding, "At this point, however, it's hard to take at face value a defense that is factually questionable, entirely self-serving, and a still incomplete account of what senior Justice Department officials knew about gun walking."

Holder's letter provoked an equally biting [letter](#) to the Attorney General from Issa which declared in part:

The current paper trail ... creates the strong perception that your statement in front of Congress was less than truthful. Your staff ... was certainly aware of "Fast and Furious" over a year ago.

Issa's letter offered specifics, including the following:

Gary Grindler, the then-Deputy Attorney General and currently your chief of staff, received an extremely detailed briefing on "Operation Fast and Furious" on March 12, 2010. In this briefing, Grindler learned such minutiae as the number of times that Uriel Patino, a straw purchaser on food stamps who ultimately acquired 720 firearms, went in to a cooperating gun store and the amount of guns that he had bought. When former Acting ATF Director Ken Melson, a career federal prosecutor, learned similar information, he became sick to his stomach.

Pointing to such data as this, Issa is convinced that there was "widespread knowledge" within the Justice Department's "senior ranks" that "gunwalking [was] occurring." Issa's letter accuses Holder of attempting to "shift blame" and "hide behind [his staff] for failing to inform you about Operation Fast and Furious when they reviewed the memos sent to you last summer,"

Issa continued:

Your letter ... did little but obfuscate, shift blame, berate, and attempt to change the topic away from the department's responsibility in the creation, implementation, and authorization of this reckless program. You claim that, after months of silence, you "must now address these issues" over Fast and Furious because of the harmful discourse of the past few days. Yet, the only major development of these past few days has been the release of multiple documents showing that you and your senior staff had been briefed, on numerous occasions, about "Fast and Furious."

It simply is not believable that you were not briefed on Fast and Furious until a few weeks before your testimony. At the very least, you should have known about Fast and Furious well before then.

[Appearing](#) on Fox and Friends, Issa asserted,

[Holder] wants us to believe that he came to a hearing, having read about some terrible allegations [and] only having just learned of it, and not asking any additional questions, at least the ones in his weekly briefings, that if he read his weekly briefings, he would have known about what he now says he didn't know.

Justice Department officials continue to insist that they have in fact been cooperative in the investigation, and will continue to be. A Department spokeswoman stated, "The department will continue to cooperate with both the inspector general and congressional investigations. In the meantime, what the American people deserve is less partisan showboating and more responsible solutions to stopping gun violence."

Issa has indicated that he will be sending a new set of subpoenas to the Justice Department in order to seek further information.



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*Photo: Rep. Darrell Issa*

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