

June 21, 2011

(Washington, DC) – U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) released the following statement in response to the expected resignation of Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF) Acting Director Kenneth Melson amid controversy over two ATF operations, "Project Gunrunner" and its offshoot, known as "Fast and Furious."

"In recent years, the ATF has been plagued with problems," said Altmire. "The fact that an agency responsible for keeping firearms out of the hands of criminals sought to arm known lawbreakers through seriously flawed clandestine operations calls into question Mr. Melson's judgment. Even more troubling has been Mr. Melson's refusal to cooperate with oversight investigations to uncover answers about the operations."

Mr. Melson's expected resignation comes after a recent letter led by Congressman Altmire and cosigned by 30 Democrats was sent to President Obama to express serious concerns with the administration's response to Congressional inquiries into Project Gunrunner and Operation Fast and Furious. The ATF conducted these operations through 2009 and 2010 to monitor weapons purchases by suspected gun smugglers. They were designed to seek out firearm traffickers, however, reports surfaced that the ATF allowed, and in some cases even encouraged, suspected smugglers to buy large quantities of firearms. The agency also lost track of some of the guns sold in the operations, and it has been reported that one of the missing firearms was responsible for the death of a Border Patrol Agent. Congressman Altmire's letter asked for prompt and complete answers to the questions surrounding Project Gunrunner and Operation Fast and Furious. Despite several requests from Members of Congress, the Department of Justice has not been forthcoming with information or clarification about these operations.

"The ATF has been without a permanent director since 2006. The "Project Gunrunner" and "Fast and Furious" debacle has made it clear that this agency needs new leadership that is not only committed to protecting American's Second Amendment rights, but also open and transparent government," Altmire said. "I am hopeful that Mr. Melson's resignation will bring a fresh start to the ATF so it can do a better job of following the law and keeping guns out of the hands of criminals."

As a strong supporter of Second Amendment rights, Congressman Altmire is also the lead

Democratic sponsor of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (BATFE) Reform Act (H.R. 1093). This legislation would clarify regulations and remove unnecessary restrictions on federally licensed firearms dealers and importers in the United States.