

August 9, 2010

President Barack Obama  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

We are writing to you as former Directors and agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives (ATF). We hope to impress upon you the urgency of nominating a Director of this critical agency.

About 300 people are shot in America each day. Since you took office, approximately 150,000 Americans have been wounded by gunfire. Over 45,000 have been killed. We have witnessed horrific shootings across our country and are now faced with unprecedented drug-related gun violence in Mexico seeping across our border. As a country, we have mourned as mass shootings have torn families apart. Legally prohibited firearms purchasers have obtained weapons and threatened national security in shootings at the Pentagon and Fort Hood.

ATF is the primary federal agency responsible for enforcing the nation's gun laws and preventing dangerous people from obtaining dangerous weapons. Its capacity to perform this vital function is seriously diminished without a permanent Director. It is critical that ATF have a leader who will marshal ATF's resources to aggressively combat America's gun violence epidemic.

Since Director Carl Truscott stepped down in 2006, the agency has not had a permanent Director. Ken Melson took the position of Acting Director after you took office, but because he was never formally nominated, Mr. Melson exhausted the statutory limit on Acting Directors and the Bureau continues without a permanent leader. ATF is too important an agency – and gun violence is too grave a problem – to be allowed to remain leaderless.

American communities need an ATF Director with a strong record of preventing gun violence, who will enforce federal gun laws against corrupt gun dealers and gun traffickers. ATF's own crime gun data shows that approximately 1% of federal firearms dealers supply almost 60% of guns traced to crimes. The ATF's ability to inspect and monitor gun dealers who supply the illegal market is significantly curtailed without a permanent Director. Gun traffickers and corrupt dealers get the wrong message when the nation's lead agency charged with enforcing gun laws lacks a permanent leader for such an extended period of time.

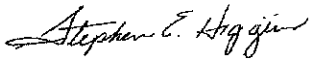
ATF also needs a Director to fight the misnamed "ATF Reform and Firearms Modernization Act" (H.R. 2296/S. 941) – one of the broadest attacks on ATF's power to enforce federal law in decades. This pending legislation would cripple ATF's ability to shut down corrupt gun dealers and enforce federal gun laws. For example, it would make it more difficult for ATF to revoke the licenses of lawbreaking gun dealers that allow hundreds of guns to

“disappear” from their inventory without any record of sale. It is critical that your Administration vigorously oppose this legislation and appoint an ATF Director who will strongly defend the role of ATF in stopping gun trafficking and gun crime.

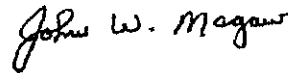
Not only is the leadership vacancy at ATF injurious to public safety and national security, it has an adverse effect on foreign policy as well. This spring, President Calderón of Mexico told Congress, “There is one issue where Mexico needs your cooperation. And that is stopping the flow of assault weapons and other deadly arms across the border.” President Calderón has also stated that Mexico has seized 75,000 guns over a three-year period and 80 percent of those traced originated with American gun shops. Since President Calderón made these statements, violence in Mexico has gotten worse, most notably with the assassination of Rodolfo Torre Cantú, a popular gubernatorial candidate. Heavy and continuous trafficking of assault rifles and other firearms to Mexico enables the deadly violence of the drug cartels. Many thousands have died in Mexico, and now there are concerns that the violence has started to seep across the border. Recently, the National Guard was ordered to respond on the U.S. side of the border. ATF needs a Director with a commitment to stopping gun traffickers and corrupt dealers from arming criminals beyond our borders as well as within them.

As former ATF Directors and officials, we respectfully ask that you make appointing an ATF Director an urgent priority. Americans need an ATF Director who will aggressively enforce the law, shut down corrupt gun dealers, and fight gun trafficking. Every day that passes with a leaderless ATF, the consequences grow deadlier.

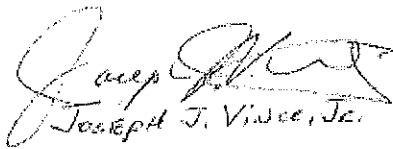
Sincerely,



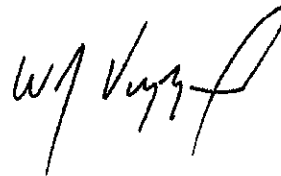
Stephen Higgins, Former ATF Director  
1982-1993



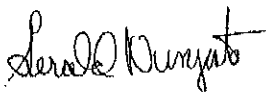
John Magaw, Former ATF Director  
1993-1999



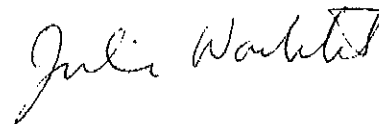
Joseph J. Vince, Jr.  
Former Chief,  
Crime Gun Analysis Branch, ATF



William Vizzard  
Former Special Agent in Charge, ATF



Gerald Nunziato  
Former Special Agent in Charge,  
National Tracing Center, ATF



Julius Wachtel  
Former Resident Agent in Charge,  
ATF, Long Beach Field Office