

# Republicans, IG Take Justice Dept. To Task

BY PETE YOST

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans eagerly joined the Justice Department's inspector general in taking the agency to task Thursday for its bungled gun-trafficking probe in Arizona that allowed hundreds of weapons to reach Mexican drug rings.

At a committee hearing, Democrats fought an uphill battle as the committee's Republicans, led by its chairman, Rep. Darrell Issa of California, wrapped themselves in the findings of Inspector General Michael Horowitz about Operation Fast and Furious.

Horowitz faulted the Justice Department for misguided strategies, errors in judgment and management failures in a gun-tracking operation that he said disregarded public safety.

"There needs to be supervision; there needs to be oversight," and law enforcement operations like Operation Fast and Furious need to be referred from the start to "the highest levels" of the department, Horowitz testified. His report faulted midlevel and senior officials for not briefing Attorney General Eric Holder much earlier.

Issa declared that Horowitz's 471-page report, released Wednesday, "is a huge step forward toward restoring the public faith in the Department of Justice."

The report proves "to both sides of the aisle that you could" do the job of looking into the facts of Operation Fast and Furious, "and I want to personally thank you," Issa told Horowitz.

The inspector general was walking a fine political line between vociferous Republican criticisms of the operation begun during the Obama administration and Democratic defenses of Holder.

"We found no evidence that the attorney general was aware" of Operation Fast and Furious or the much-disputed "gun-walking" tactic associated with it, Horowitz told Democratic Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton of the District of Columbia. Fast and Furious began in October 2009 and Horowitz said subordinates should have told Holder about it well before 2011.

President Barack Obama, in an appearance Thursday on Univision, a

Spanish-language television network, also said the gun-trafficking probe in Arizona was "completely wrongheaded" but said he retains confidence in Holder.

"He has shown himself to be accountable" by taking action against those who directed the operation, Obama said.

Obama said ultimately he himself was responsible, but he noted that Horowitz found that "people (in the Justice Department) should have known in some cases even if they didn't actually know" about the operation.

Another point on which Horowitz vindicated Democrats was that risky gun-walking experiments originated in the administration of Republican President George W. Bush when the department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in Tucson, Ariz., launched Operation Wide Receiver. That operation in 2006-2007 resulted in the ATF losing track of 400 guns.

Gun-walking was an experimental investigative tactic, barred under long-standing department policy. ATF agents in Arizona allowed suspected straw purchasers, believed to be working for Mexican drug gangs, to leave gun stores with weapons in order to track them and try to bring charges against gun-smuggling kingpins who long had eluded prosecution, but they lost track of most of the guns.

The experimental operations were a response to widespread criticisms of the agency's anti-smuggling efforts. Because of thin ATF staffing and weak penalties, the traditional strategy of arresting suspected straw buyers as soon as possible had failed to stop the flow of tens of thousands of guns to Mexico — more than 68,000 in the past five years.

But outside scrutiny of the Arizona experiments soared after two of the 2,000 weapons thought to have been acquired at Phoenix-area gun stores by illicit buyers during the Fast and Furious investigation were recovered at the scene of a shootout that claimed the life of U.S. border agent Brian Terry. About 1,400 of the total have yet to be recovered.

Fast and Furious has produced charges against 20 gun traffickers, 14 of whom have pleaded guilty so far.

## A botched operation

Main findings of an investigation into The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives' Operation Fast and Furious, a plan to follow guns acquired by cartels, build cases against their leaders and learn smuggling routes:

### Background



Brian Terry

**March 2011** Reports emerge that officials running the program lost track of hundreds of firearms, many of which had been linked to crimes; Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, launches an inquiry

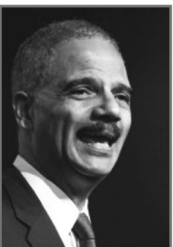
### Eric Holder involvement

**Oct. 12** Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, issues a subpoena seeking communication involving Attorney General Eric Holder, other Justice Department and White House officials in connection with the plan

**June 20, 2012** President Barack Obama invokes executive privilege to avoid releasing documents; Issa's panel recommends that Holder be held in contempt of Congress

**June 28** House votes to hold Holder in contempt

### 471-page report released



Eric Holder

• Weinstein, who was Breuer's aide, resigned Wednesday after it was reported that he failed to ask firearms officials about questionable tactics

• Kenneth Melson, who was acting director of ATF until 2011 when he was reassigned, will retire

Source: Reuters, Congressional Research Service, MCT Photo Service  
Graphic: Chicago Tribune

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**Late 2009** ATF launches the operation

**December 2010** U.S. Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry is killed in a firefight in the desert near Rio Rico, Ariz.

**February 2011** Federal law enforcement tells congressional investigators that assault rifles found at the scene of Terry's death were part of a series of purchases being monitored under the operation



Darrell Issa

# Obama: Romney Is Out Of Touch With America

BY DAVID ESPO AND KEN THOMAS

Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — President Barack Obama cast Mitt Romney on Thursday as an out-of-touch challenger for the White House and an advocate of education cuts that could cause teacher strikes to spread from Chicago to other cities. The Republican countered that the U.S. economy "is bumping along the bottom" under Obama, and he predicted victory in the fall.

The two men eyed each other across hotly contested Florida, a state with 29 electoral votes, more than any other battleground in the close race for the White House.

"When you express an attitude that half the country considers itself victims, that somehow they want to be dependent on government, my thinking is maybe you haven't gotten around a lot," the president said. That was in response to a question about Romney's recent observation that 47 percent of Americans pay no income tax and believe they are victims and entitled to an array of federal benefits.

Obama spoke at a town hall-style forum aired by the Spanish-language television network Univision.

For his part, Romney was eager to move past that controversy, which has knocked him off stride. He disclosed plans for a three-day bus tour early next week through Ohio with running mate Paul Ryan and sought to return the campaign focus to the economic issues that have dominated the race all year.

At a fundraiser in Miami, Romney looked ahead to his televised head-to-head encounters with Obama this fall. "He's a very eloquent speaker, and so I'm sure in the debates, as last time ... he'll be very eloquent in describing his vision," the Republican said. "But he can't win by his words, because his record speaks so loudly in our ears. What he has done in the last four years is establish an economy that's bumping along the bottom."

Less than seven weeks before Election Day, polls make the race a close one, likely to be settled in eight or so swing states where neither man has a solid edge. Obama has gained ground in polls in some of those states since the completion of the Democratic National Convention two weeks ago, while Romney has struggled with controversies of his own making that have left Republicans frustrated at his performance as a candidate.

Still, there were fresh signs of weakness in the nation's job market as the two candidates vied for support in Florida.

The Labor Department said the number of Americans seeking unemployment fell only slightly last week, to a seasonally adjusted level of 382,000, suggesting that businesses remain reluctant to add to their payrolls. The four-week av-



C.W. GRIFFIN/MIAMI HERALD

**President Obama, middle, speaks with Jorge Ramos and Maria Elena Salinas at Univision's Meet the Candidates forum at the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Florida, on Thursday.**

erage rose for the fifth straight week to the highest level in nearly three months.

After more than two days of struggle, Romney seemed eager to leave the 47 percent controversy behind as he appeared at the Univision forum Wednesday night. "My campaign is about the 100 percent in America," he said firmly.

But Obama made his most extensive comments to date on the subject since the emergence of a video showing Romney telling donors last May that as a candidate his job wasn't to worry about 47 percent of the country.

"Their problem is not they're not working hard enough or they don't want to work or they're being taxed too little or they just want to loaf around and gather government checks," the president said.

"Are there people that abuse the system? Yes, both at the bottom and at the top," he added, including millionaires who he said pay no income taxes. He said many at the low end of the income scale pay other forms of taxes, and some who don't pay taxes are senior citizens, students, disabled, veterans or soldiers who are stationed overseas.

"Americans work hard, and if they are not working right now I promise you they want to go to work," he said.

As for education, the president said Romney and running mate Ryan advocate a budget that would cut federal funds for schools by about 20 percent.

"And you could see potentially even more teachers being laid off, working conditions for teachers

becoming even worse and potentially for more strikes," he said.

The president added that under his administration, "what we say to school districts all across the country is we will provide you with more help as long as you're being accountable, and as far as teachers go, I think they work as hard as anybody, but we also want to make sure that they are having high standards of performance in math and science."

Money was not a significant issue in the Chicago strike. Mayor Rahm Emanuel secured an extension of the school day and empowered principals to hire the teachers they want. Teachers were able to soften a new evaluation process and win some job protections.

The day's campaign events showed the complexities of cam-

paigning in Florida, a state that is home to large populations of seniors and of Hispanics.

Romney released a new television commercial designed to appeal to both groups.

It features Sen. Marco Rubio plugging the Republicans' plan to overhaul Medicare, a flashpoint in the campaign that Obama says could threaten future beneficiaries with high out-of-pocket costs.

While Obama is likely to win the Hispanic vote overwhelmingly, he drew criticism in his appearances.

He said the lack of immigration reform legislation was his biggest failure as president and "not for a lack of trying or desire." He said he couldn't find a single Republican to help work on the legislation. "I'm happy to take responsibility for being naive here," the president said when pressed to admit he broke his promise.

Univision anchor Jorge Ramos interjected, "You promised us, and a promise is a promise. And with all due respect, you didn't keep that promise."

Obama drew praise from Hispanic groups earlier in the year when he announced a policy shift that will allow some immigrants brought to the United States illegally as children to avoid deportation.

Romney has been critical of the change, but has declined to say if he would reverse it if he wins the White House.

## Obama's Record In Muslim World Falls Short

WASHINGTON (AP) — Images of angry mobs in Arab cities burning American flags and attacking U.S. diplomatic posts suggest the Muslim world is no less enraged at the United States than when President George W. Bush had to duck shoes hurled at him in Baghdad.

But more than three years after President Barack Obama declared in Cairo that he would seek "a new beginning" in U.S.-Muslim relations, a closer look reveals strides as well as setbacks.

One U.S.-led war is over and another is receding, although there are questions about whether America has made lasting gains in Afghanistan. The Arab Spring revolution, a spontaneous combustion that happened independent of Western influence, has given people new power and hope as well as democratic elections the U.S. supports.

But peace between Israel and the Palestinians is nowhere in sight, Iran is seen as a menace and broad mistrust with America is still deep and explosive across much of the Muslim world.

As nations across North Africa and the Middle East move chaotically toward democracy, they and Washington have settled into a wary, redefined relationship. Obama is not ready to call Mohammad Morsi, the popularly elected Egyptian president, an ally, and the democratically elected Iraqi president, Nouri al-Maliki, has dismissed U.S. demands that he stop Iran from using Iraqi airspace to fly weapons to Syria for use against anti-government rebels.

## MD Group Names Best Birth Control For Teens

CHICAGO (AP) — Teenage girls may prefer the pill, the patch or even wishful thinking, but their doctors should be recommending IUDs or hormonal implants — long-lasting and more effective birth control that you don't have to remember to use every time, the nation's leading gynecologists group said Thursday.

The IUD and implants are safe and nearly 100 percent effective at preventing pregnancy, and should be "first-line recommendations," the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists said in updating its guidance for teens.

Both types of contraception are more invasive than the pill, requiring a doctor to put them in place. That, and cost, are probably why the pill is still the most popular form of contraception in the U.S.

But birth control pills often must be taken at the very same time every day to be most potent. And forgetting to take even one can lead to pregnancy, which is why the pill is sometimes only 91 percent effective.

An IUD, or intrauterine device, is a small, T-shaped piece of plastic inserted in the uterus that can prevent pregnancy for up to 10 years. An implant is a matchstick-size plastic rod that releases hormones. It is placed under the skin of the upper arm and usually lasts three years.

## Regime Airstrikes Kill At Least Thirty In Syria

BEIRUT (AP) — Regime airstrikes hit a gas station in northern Syria Thursday, setting off a fiery explosion that killed at least 30 people and wounded dozens, opposition activists said. Amateur video showed thick black smoke engulfing the scene.

Earlier Thursday, a Syrian military helicopter crashed near the capital of Damascus, and Syria's Information Ministry said the helicopter went down after its rotor accidentally clipped the tail of a Syrian passenger plane with 200 people on board. The larger aircraft landed safely at Damascus International Airport and no one was hurt, the ministry said.

The airstrikes and the close call in the sky underscored the growing turmoil and violence in Syria. The country is embroiled in a civil war between forces fighting for President Bashar Assad and those trying to topple him. More than 23,000 people have been killed in the 18-month conflict, according to activists.

In recent weeks, Assad's regime has stepped up airstrikes in northern Syria in an attempt to dislodge rebels from areas they control there. Activists said Thursday's air attack hit near the town of Ain Issa, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) from Turkey. A day earlier, rebel fighters had seized control of a border crossing north of the town.

Rami Abdul-Rahman of the Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said that witnesses counted at least 30 bodies and that dozens of people were wounded. Another group, the Local Coordination Committees, which gathers information from a network of activists across Syria, put the death toll at 55.

## Megachurch Rocked By Sex Abuse Allegations

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — A 17,000-member megachurch deep in Oklahoma's Bible Belt has been rattled by allegations that five employees waited two weeks to report the rape of a 13-year-old girl in a campus stairwell, allegedly by a church worker.

Tulsa police say the girl is among at least three victims of alleged sex crimes by two former employees of Victory Christian Center who face criminal charges. A child crimes investigator says more victims could surface as police continue to investigate.

Authorities, however, fear some parishioners in the large, tight-knit south Tulsa congregation may choose to pray about the allegations rather than provide concrete evidence.

Police said this week that the worldwide ministry's pastor and co-founder, Sharon Daugherty, whose daily broadcasts are beamed via satellite to more than 200 countries, knew about the abuse allegations, but trusted ministry employees to follow in-house policies on reporting such incidents.

Former church employee Chris Denman, 20, was arrested Sept. 5 for allegedly raping a 13-year-old girl in a stairwell before a church service on Aug. 13. He also is charged with molesting a 15-year-old girl sometime between Aug. 13 and Aug. 17. He has pleaded not guilty and faces an Oct. 11 preliminary hearing, court records show.

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