



The federal government under the Bush administration ran an operation that allowed hundreds of guns to be transferred to suspected arms traffickers — the same tactic that congressional Republicans have criticized President Barack Obama's administration for using, two federal law enforcement officials said Tuesday.

Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, and other Republicans have been hammering the Obama Justice Department over the practice known as "letting guns walk."

The congressional target has been Operation Fast and Furious, which was designed to track small-time gun buyers at several Phoenix-area gun shops up the chain to make cases against major weapons traffickers. In the process, federal agents lost track of many of the more than 2,000 guns linked to the operation.

When Bush, a Republican, was president, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives in Tucson, Ariz., used a similar enforcement tactic in a program it called Operation Wide Receiver. The fact that there were two such ATF investigations years apart in separate administrations raises the possibility that agents in still other cases may have allowed guns to "walk."

For months, Issa and other Republicans have focused on whether Attorney General Eric Holder misled Congress, suggesting that he knew more than he has admitted about Operation Fast and Furious.

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