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July 18, 2001

The Honorable David Walker
Comptroller General
General Accounting Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Walker:

Yesterday, acting FBI Director Thomas Pickard reported that 449 FBI firearms were stolen or lost over the last 12 years. The missing firearms included submachine guns, rifles, shotguns and handguns and it is my understanding that at least one of the missing guns was used in the commission of a homicide. This is simply an intolerable situation that must be rectified immediately.

As the lead agency charged with keeping firearms out of the hands of criminals, for the FBI to have lost its own firearms is inexcusable. The fact that at least one of the firearms was used in a shooting only compounds the situation, and further emphasizes the gravity of this incompetence.

This shoddy record keeping and gross negligence is not solely limited to the FBI. Indeed, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) has similar problems keeping track of its guns; news accounts indicate that INS currently has 539 firearms missing or unaccounted for. In response, Attorney General Ashcroft has requested that the Inspector General at the Department of Justice undertake an agency-wide review. This is an encouraging development, however I am extremely concerned that such sloppy accounting mechanisms are not confined to the Justice Department. If our premier law enforcement agency, the FBI, is so lax in keeping track of its guns, I shudder to think about what other abuses may exist at other federal agencies.

It is imperative that the Congress and the American public know if this problem exists elsewhere in the federal government. At a minimum, the public has the right to know that the agencies charged with protecting the public safety are keeping track of the firearms entrusted to them.

To that end, I request you immediately undertake an investigation of all federal agencies that are issued firearms to explain the accounting procedures for tracking firearms at

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each, ascertain if similar problems exist throughout the federal government, and to determine exactly how many firearms is the government missing. I request that with regard to the investigation, you pay special attention to the following matters:

1) A complete list of all civilian federal agencies, bureaus, departments and divisions that are issued firearms.

2) The accounting mechanisms for tracking firearms at each and what federal laws, if any, apply.

3) Make recommendations to the Congress as to what accounting mechanisms are necessary to ensure that there is an adequate system of tracking government issued firearms.

4) Make recommendations as to what safeguards are necessary to ensure that government issued firearms do not fall into the wrong hands.

Your prompt attention to this matter is greatly appreciated. If you have any questions about this request, please contact me directly or have your staff contact Michael Hacker of my staff at 225-4071.

With every good wish,

Sincerely,

John D. Dingell
Member of Congress