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[Senate]

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ATF'S PURCHASE OF 22 OV-10D AIRCRAFT

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, a news article in this morning's Washington Times says the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms recently purchased 22 OV-10D aircraft from the Defense Department.

These aircraft were used by the Marine Corps in the Vietnam war for close air support in combat. They were also used in Operation Desert Storm for night observation.

The aircraft are heavily weapons-capable, especially from a law-enforcement perspective. ATF says the planes have been stripped of their weapons. Their purpose, according to ATF, is for surveillance. The planes can locate people on the ground by detecting their body heat.

It's no secret that the ATF is undergoing intense public scrutiny. It has done some real bone-headed things. It has been criticized for enforcing the law while crossing the line of civil rights protections.

ATF's credibility will be even further tested the next 2 weeks when joint committee hearings are held in the other body on the Waco matter. And the Senate Judiciary Committee also will hold hearings on Waco in September.

I raise this issue today, Mr. President, because the purchase of these aircraft in the current climate might continue to feed the public's skepticism, and erode the public's confidence in our law enforcement agencies.

For that reason, it is incumbent upon ATF to fully disclose and fully inform the public as to the purchase of these aircraft.

First, what, specifically, will they be used for?

Second, where will they be located?

Third, what assurances are there that the planes will remain unarmed?

The sooner these questions are answered by ATF--openly and candidly--the less chance there is that the public's skepticism will grow.

Mr. President, the continued credibility of the ATF is on the line, in my judgment. At times such as these, when scrutiny is at its highest, the best strategy is to go on the offense. Spare no expense in disclosing fully and swiftly. Because full and swift disclosure is the first step in restoring credibility.

The ATF's credibility is important not just for itself, but for law enforcement in general. There is much work to do to restore the public's trust and confidence. I hope that ATF will step up to the challenge and provide the necessary assurances.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Washington Times article, written by Jerry Seper, be printed in the Record.

There being no objection, the article was ordered to be printed in the Record, as follows:

[From the Washington Times, July 18, 1995]

ATF Gets 22 Planes To Aid Surveillance

Weapons-capable aircraft repainted

(By Jerry Seper)

The Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms has obtained 22 counterinsurgency, heavy-weapons-capable military aircraft.

The 300-mph OV-10D planes--one of several designations used by the Marine Corps during the Vietnam War for gunfire and missile support of ground troops, and by the Air Force during Operation Desert Storm for night observation--have been transferred from the Defense Department to ATF.

The turboprop aircraft, which will be used for day and night surveillance support, were designed to locate people on the ground through their body heat.

When used by the military services, the planes were equipped with infrared tracking systems, ground-mapping radar, laser range-finders, gun sights and 20mm cannons.

ATF spokeswoman Susan McCarron confirmed yesterday that the agency had obtained the aircraft but noted they had been stripped of their armament. She said that nine of the OV-10Ds were operational and that the remaining 13 were being used for spare parts.

"We have nine OV-10Ds that are unarmed; they have no weapons on them," Ms. McCarron said. "They are being used for surveillance and photography purposes. The remainder are being used for spare parts."

Ms. McCarron said the aircraft were obtained by ATF from the Defense Department "when DOD was getting rid of them," and that other agencies also had received some of the airplanes.

General Service Administration records show that some of the unarmed aircraft also were transferred to the Bureau of Land Management for use in survey work, while others went to the California

Forestry Department for use in spotting fires and in directing ground and aerial crews in combating them.

Other models of the OV-10 also are being used by officials in Washington state for nighttime surveillance of fishing vessels suspected of overfishing the coastal waters.

The transfer of the aircraft to ATF comes at a time of heightened public skepticism and congressional scrutiny of the agency's ability to enforce the law without trampling on the rights of citizens.

The ATF's image suffered mightily in the aftermath of its 1993 raid and subsequent shootout at the Branch Davidian compound in Waco, Texas, during which four agents and six Davidians were killed. It sustained another public-relations blow after it was revealed that ATF agents helped organize a whites-only "Good O' Boys Roundup" in the Tennessee hills.

Hearings of the Waco matter begin tomorrow in the House. A Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on the racist trappings of the roundup is scheduled for Friday.

One Senate staffer yesterday said there was "some real interest" in the ATF's acquisition of the aircraft, and that questions "probably will be asked very soon of the agency" about the specifics of their use and locations where they have been assigned.

According to federal law enforcement sources and others, including two airline pilots who have seen and photographed the ATF planes, two of the combat-capable aircraft--known as "Broncos"--have been routed to Shawnee, Okla., where they were painted dark blue over the past month at an aircraft

maintenance firm known as Business Jet Designs Inc.

Michael Pruitt, foreman at Business Jet Designs, confirmed yesterday that two of the ATF aircraft had been painted at the Shawnee site and that at least one more of the OV-10Ds ``was on the way.'' Mr. Pruitt said the aircraft were painted dark blue with red and white trim. The sources said the paint jobs cost the ATF about \$20,000 each.

The firm's owner, Johnny Patterson, told associates last month he expected to be painting at least 12 of the ATF aircraft but was unsure whether he could move all of them fast enough through his shop. Mr. Patterson was out of town yesterday and not available for comment.

According to the sources, the ATF's OV-10Ds, recently were overhauled under the government's Service Life Extension Program and were equipped with a state-of-the-art forward-looking infrared system that allows the pilot to locate and identify targets at nights--similar to the tracking system used on the Apache advanced attack helicopter.

Designed by Rockwell International, the OV-10D originally was outfitted with two 7.62mm M-60C machine guns, each with 500

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rounds of ammunition. It also was modified to carry one Sidewinder missile under each wing, Snakeye bombs, fire bombs, rocket packages and cluster bombs.

The OV-10D can carry a 20mm gun turret with 1,500 rounds of ammunition.

During the Vietnam War, two OV-10Ds were used for a variety of missions during a six-week period and flew more than 200 missions in which they were credited with killing 300 enemy troops and saving beleaguered outposts from being overrun by the communists.
