

May 30, 2013

The Honorable Patrick Leahy
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
224 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Sent Via Fax: (202) 224-9516

Re: Nomination of B. Todd Jones as ATF Director

Dear Chairman Leahy:

I am writing in support of the nomination of Mr. Byron Todd Jones as the Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. My name is V.J Smith, and I am both the National President of the MADDADS (which stands for Men Against Destruction Defending Against Drugs and Social-disorder)—an organization that is well-rooted, loved, and recognized as the “father figure” of Urban America— as well as the local Founder of the Minneapolis Chapter of MADDADS. MADDADS is a “Best Practice” organization that is well-invested in the areas of crime prevention and community building within low-income communities of color. We have a solid reputation for effective crime prevention and community building services and our successful model of crime prevention is in line with the community-based approach utilized by Mr. Byron Todd Jones while he has served as US Attorney here in Minnesota.

Being on the frontlines, I have witnessed countless community members who were violently slaughtered by criminals who had access to illegal guns. There was, and still is, a need to close the gaps between community members who are distrustful of law enforcement agencies and the various law enforcement agencies that are dedicated to preventing victimization in the community. It's bad enough that many of the community members are at odds against each other. To allow the possibility for further conflict within the community— between those who are sworn to protect the community and those who belong to the community – can be very damaging to the community as a whole. The law-abiding citizens that live in the community will feel as if they have nowhere to turn, while the criminals in the community who are destroying it will feel encouraged to continue to wreak havoc.

The ATF needs the consistent and accountable leadership of a permanent director. That permanent director should be Mr. Jones. Many communities are still recovering from the damage caused by gun-walking scandals such as Operation Fast and Furious, which allowed illegal guns to stay in the hands of violent criminals. The incidents of mass violence in Newtown and Aurora are daily occurrences in many low-income communities who suffer from excessive gang violence. B. Todd Jones' innovative and effective strategies have done measures to help the many concerned citizens of low-income communities of color (such as myself) find away to combat the senseless violence that is perpetuated at alarming rates due to the continuous flow of illegal guns into the neighborhoods.

Mr. Jones' community-based approaches are crucial in the war against gun violence. In my opinion, he has utilized this approach effectively on numerous occasions throughout his career. One example of this is the Young Somali-American Advisory Council, which utilized effective outreach methods to engage the large Somali population within the Minneapolis metropolitan area to prevent any potential disconnect between ethnic Somali-Americans and law enforcement agencies. Mr. Jones' approach to counter-terrorism is beneficial to the Twin Cities, as it promotes a sense of unity and solidarity between the different nationalities that occupy the same low-income areas and communities of color. I also commend Mr. Jones for his role in creating the Safe Streets Task Force, which unites the efforts of both local authorities and the FBI to curb gang violence in our urban communities.

I have personally worked with Mr. Jones on various crime prevention efforts in Minneapolis, St. Paul, Brooklyn Center and other areas within the Twin Cities metropolitan area during his time as US attorney in Minnesota. Mr. Jones has a history of civic engagement and community-based initiatives, as he has been on various boards—such as the St. Paul Chapter of the NAACP, Twin Cities RISE, Catholic Charities of Minneapolis/St. Paul, and the Jeremiah Project. He clearly has an understanding of community-related issues and concerns, as he has been consistently involved with community-building activities in the Twin Cities for more than two decades.

Being the National President of the MADDADS, as well as a local community leader who is heavily invested in the future of low-income communities of color, I feel it is absolutely imperative that Mr. Jones continue his good work in bridging the ever-widening disconnects between law enforcement agencies and community members. In order to achieve the above-mentioned task, we need more law enforcement executives like Mr. Jones, who are knowledgeable and experienced in community-based approaches to law enforcement and crime prevention. I pray that you consider my request to keep Mr. Byron Todd Jones as the Director of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives - the future of our community depends on it.

Sincerely,

VJ Smith

MADDADS National President/ Founder of Minneapolis Chapter of MADDADS