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February 3, 2026

The Honorable Charles E. Grassley
Chairman
**COMMITTEE ON THE
JUDICIARY – UNITED STATES
SENATE**
135 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Richard J. Durbin
Ranking Member
**COMMITTEE ON THE
JUDICIARY – UNITED STATES
SENATE**
711 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: *Letter in Support of Robert Cekada to Serve as Next ATF Director*

Dear Chairman Grassley & Ranking Member Durbin:

I write on behalf of the International Association of Arson Investigators, Inc. (“IAAI”) in support of Robert Cekada to serve as the next Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, & Explosives (“ATF”) Director. As a twenty-year ATF veteran and its current Deputy Director, Deputy Director Cekada will serve this position well.

With nearly 12,000 members worldwide and a history dating back to 1949, the IAAI is the largest international professional association of public and private sector fire and explosion investigation professionals. Our mission is to inspire the international fire and explosion investigation community to achieve excellence, and our vision is to make a safer world by serving as the global resource for that community. As an organization committed to helping professionals become their best selves – to become qualified, certified, and competent – our focus is preparation. That focus closely aligns with ATF’s statutory responsibility to investigate arson, explosives, and destructive device crimes. Few federal agencies share that mission so directly, and no agency advances it more effectively than the ATF through disciplined training, scientific rigor, and cooperative partnerships.

Few leaders understand the impact of ATF’s frontline work better than Deputy Director Cekada. In addition to his more than two decades of service with ATF, he previously served as an ATF Certified Explosives Specialist (“CES”), providing him with that firsthand experience investigating explosive incidents and enforcing the laws that govern explosives and destructive devices. That background, combined with his service as a Special Agent, Special Agent in Charge,

Executive Assistant Director for Operations, and now Deputy Director, provides him with a rare, comprehensive perspective – from the scene of a fire or explosion investigation to the executive decisions that shape and support national policy and resource allocation.

Arson, explosives, and destructive device crimes are among the most devastating offenses confronting our frontline communities, resulting in loss of life, serious injury, economic disruption, and highly complex investigation scenes. ATF-Certified Fire Investigators (“CFI”) and ATF-CESs provide nationally recognized expertise, conducting scientifically grounded origin and cause examinations, leading violent crime investigations, and delivering expert testimony in courtrooms across the country. The ATF-CFI and ATF-CES programs require extensive field experience, hundreds of hours of specialized instruction, peer-reviewed research, and independent certification and, as a result, those programs stand as national and international models for preparing public sector investigators to seek the truth.

Deputy Director Cekada’s leadership has strengthened this core principle of preparation. Under his stewardship, the ATF continues to emphasize advanced training through the ATF National Center for Explosives Training and Research (“NCETR”), science-driven research at the ATF Fire Research Laboratory (“FRL”), diverse expertise and rapid response capabilities of the ATF’s National Response Teams (“NRT”) and International Response Teams (“IRT”), and operational capabilities such as the ATF Accelerant Detection Canine (“ADC”) and Explosives Detection Canine (“EDC”) programs.

Equally important, the ATF has long recognized that successful arson and explosives investigations must be paired with informed prosecution and, as part of its mission, ATF has long provided specialized Arson and Explosives for Prosecutors training programs to federal, state, and local prosecutors to ensure complex fire and explosives cases are effectively presented and adjudicated. These integrated efforts reflect leadership that understands preparation extends from the scene to the laboratory and into the courtroom.

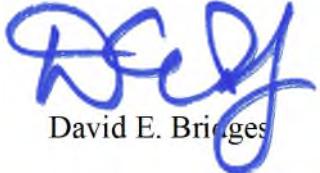
The IAAI is committed to taking proactive steps to identify, develop, and implement training programs that meaningfully prepare public and private sector professionals to seek the truth in fire and explosion investigations. Deputy Director Cekada’s career reflects that same commitment. His roots run deep in public service. Deputy Director Cekada’s local law enforcement experience with the New York City Police Department and City of Plantation Police Department, and experience as a frontline investigator, ATF Special Agent, ATF CES, and ATF senior executive ensures that no one is better positioned to appreciate how training, certification, and scientific discipline translate into credible investigations, successful prosecutions, and safer communities. As a dedicated public servant with over 30 years of experience in law enforcement, including more than two decades at the ATF, he brings institutional knowledge, operational credibility, and a sustained commitment to preparation.

On behalf of the IAAI and its fire and explosion investigation and litigation professionals around the world, I respectfully urge the United States Senate and the Committee on the Judiciary to advance Deputy Director Cekada’s nomination. I am confident he will continue to lead the ATF with integrity, operational insight, and an unwavering commitment to preparation and excellence in support of all public fire and explosion investigation and litigation professionals who uncover the truth when lives, property, and justice are at stake.

If you have any questions, or if you need any additional information in support of Deputy

Director Cekada, please let IAAI Executive Director, Anne Stone, or me know. We thank the United States Senate and the Committee on the Judiciary for its consideration.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "DEB".

David E. Bridges

DEB/16989992.1

cc: Anne Stone, IAAI Executive Director (via e-mail PDF only) (anne.stone@firearson.com)
Kimberly Albrecht-Taylor, Esq. (via e-mail PDF only) (kimberly.albrecht-taylor@atf.gov)