



**Testimony**

**W. Ralph Basham**

**Partner, Command Consulting Group**

**Former Commissioner of the U.S. Customs and Border Patrol**

**Former Director of the U.S. Secret Service**

**Before the**

**U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform**

**“White House Perimeter Breach: New Concerns about the Secret Service”**

**September 30, 2014**

White House Perimeter Breach: New Concerns about the Secret Service  
September 30, 2014

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Cummings, distinguished members of the Committee: I am grateful for the invitation to be with you today and for the opportunity to share my perspective on the recent event at the White House, and, more broadly, on the current state of an agency I care a great deal about, the United States Secret Service.

My outlook is one that has been shaped by a career of over 30 years in the Secret Service, and from my experiences at the head of three other operational components within the Department of Homeland Security. This experience also includes five years in the private sector, where I remain deeply involved in homeland security issues and in the implementation of international best practices as it relates to the protection of individuals and high value assets.

I had the honor of joining the Secret Service in 1971, where I enjoyed a challenging and interesting career, including being on the protective details of Henry Kissinger, Vice President Bush, Vice President Quayle, Vice President Gore, and countless foreign heads of state and foreign dignitaries. I also served as the Special Agent in Charge of the Cleveland and Washington Field Offices and as the Assistant Director for Training, the Assistant Director for Administration and, in several other diverse assignments, supported the agency's dual missions of protection and investigations.

In 1998, I was appointed by the Clinton Administration as the Director of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center in Glynco, Georgia, which, as the committee knows, is responsible for providing basic and advanced training for most federal law enforcement agencies in the United States, as well as many state, local, and tribal police forces.

After the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks, I was asked to return to Washington D.C. to help create the Transportation Security Administration from scratch.

In 2003, I was appointed Director of the Secret Service, where I was honored to serve for three years.

Just as I was preparing for retirement from federal service, President Bush requested that I take on one final assignment as Commissioner of US Customs and Border Protection (CBP). As the Committee knows, CBP is the largest law enforcement agency in the United States, with responsibility for the border security of our country at and between our air, land, and sea ports of entry.

Secretary Napolitano and the Obama Administration asked me to remain in that position, which I did until I left federal service in mid – 2009 for the private sector, where, along with a few partners, I formed Command Consulting Group. Command is an international homeland and national security advisory and management services firm, where I have had the opportunity to work with international government and private sector clients who are seeking to implement best in class improvements to their security capabilities against the full range of physical security, cyber security, terrorist, and criminal risks.

Therefore the viewpoint I will share on the subject before the Committee today is informed largely by my experience within the Secret Service, but also with the benefit of having worked for and with many other elite security organizations around the world over almost forty years.

First, let me commend the members of the Committee for the time and interest you are showing on this subject, especially at this juncture, when there are so many pressing security concerns to which our government must pay attention. Throughout my various positions in government, I have always found hearings such as this to be a useful tool in advancing a dialog between the Congress and government agencies, with the benefit of outside perspective as well.

It goes without saying that the recent incident with an individual jumping the White House fence, running across the North Lawn and making it just inside the front door of the White House is unacceptable and inexcusable. This is not just my view but I believe it to be the view of the Director of the Secret Service, other senior management of that agency as well as the rank and file employees.

I also believe that it is important to keep this incident in perspective and have some appreciation for the life and death decisions that the officers and agents of the Secret Service have to make in a split-second and under extremely stressful circumstances. Some of the decisions made during this incident will be thoroughly examined, procedures will be debated, training may be altered, and, in the end, the Secret Service will learn valuable lessons as they have been doing throughout their history of protecting the President and his family.

Among all of the qualities and values fundamental to the Secret Service culture, perhaps none is more important to its success than that of intensive self-examination. This is an agency which has never been reluctant to “red team” incidents – those of high consequence and those more routine – to find opportunities for improvement in the way it conducts its business, the way it trains its people, and the tools that it uses to accomplish its incredibly important mission. I can tell you from my time in the Secret Service, as its Director, and also having run its training program and having spent thousands of hours in training myself, that examining the failures in the Secret Service and other protection agencies’ history is a highly valued and daily exercise in helping understand why the agents take the precautions and plan and execute protective assignments in the way that they do, and in exploring ways of doing it better. This is not an organization that fears or discourages self-examination or self-improvement, but rather one that understands why it is so important to its continued success and one that insists on it happening routinely.

Again, perspective is critically important in this incident. We could easily be sitting here today discussing why an Iraq war veteran, possibly suffering through the awful curse of post-traumatic stress disorder, was shot dead on the North Lawn, rather than being tackled at the front door. In 1976 it was a different outcome. Officers shot and killed an individual who came over the fence—he was carrying a long, dark object in his hand which turned out to be a pipe – but the officer’s judgment that day was that it was a weapon and lethal force was employed. These split-second, life and death decisions are difficult.

The United States Secret Service is among very select company as one of the most elite law enforcement agencies in the world. This is certainly true when it comes to its incredible work on complex investigations of high importance to this nation – on financial fraud, cybercrime, and other matters. Since 1901, when the agency first assumed the responsibility, the Secret Service has been best known as the very best dignitary protection organization in the world. It remains, in fact, the model that other governments seek to emulate when building their own protection forces, and for good reason. The professionalism and competence which the vast majority of the men and women in the Secret Service demonstrate on a daily basis is something that the United States Congress and the American people should be very proud of, and I certainly hope that we will not let the very few incidents which find their way onto the headlines overwhelm the reality of what these public servants do every day for our country.

I can tell you that my confidence remains extremely high that this aspect of the Service's culture remains as strong today as it ever has been, and the Committee should feel confident that the men and women in leadership positions take every opportunity to learn and improve from incidents large and small, whether the cameras are pointed in their direction or not. As it relates to this most recent incident, I know that the agency will learn valuable lessons it can apply immediately to improve security at the White House and in other settings.

One important thing which I would urge the Committee to keep in mind when examining the Secret Service or an event such as the recent incursion onto the White House grounds, is the fact that the broader context in which the Service operates is not one which values security alone. When I was Commissioner of US Customs and Border Protection, we had the very difficult job of ensuring that our border was secure from terrorists, criminal organizations and other illicit actors, but we always had to plan and execute our mission with the understanding that the free flow of people and commerce is fundamental to the vitality of our economy and the very principles on which our nation was founded. We could not employ a strategy which valued security at all costs; it had to be one which balanced our security needs with the imperative that we allow, and in fact facilitate, the movement of people and goods across the borders of this country. We not only had to ensure the security of our borders with this balance in mind, but we also, of course, had to do so with limited resources when compared to the mission at hand.

On a smaller scale, the same is true for the Secret Service. The Service has to ensure that the President, other protectees, and the facilities in which they work and live are safe and secure, but they do so in the context of important American values like freedom and openness. This is all in close coordination with cooperation and almost always after negotiation with a myriad of other stakeholders and decision makers who have diverse priorities, responsibilities, and viewpoints.

This dynamic is, in fact, more true when it comes to the area surrounding the White House complex than in any other case. As much as I may have wished it when I was the Director, the Secret Service absolutely cannot act unilaterally when it comes to almost any security feature in and around the White House. The Government of the District of Columbia, including its police department, is an important voice and influential stakeholder in any adjustments to the area surrounding the White House, especially to the important roadways and sidewalks on Pennsylvania Avenue, E Street, Constitution Avenue, H Street, 15<sup>th</sup> Street, and 17<sup>th</sup> Street. So is the National Park Service and the Park Police, especially as it relates to Lafayette Park, the

Ellipse, and the National Mall. The White House Historical Society, the Government Services Administration, and others all provide input into any architectural changes and improvements, new infrastructure, or changes in appearance.

As a simple example, the closure of Pennsylvania Avenue in front of the White House to vehicular traffic, a security imperative for many years from the Secret Service's perspective, was politically impossible until the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995, which made it impossible for anyone to deny the impact a vehicular borne explosive could have to a government building, no less a 200 year old sandstone mansion. Even then, it was not until 2004, when I was Director, that we were able to complete the project to permanently convert this portion of the road into a pedestrian mall. I might add that to this day, there are those who believe the Avenue should be re-opened in spite of overwhelming and irrefutable evidence of the extreme risk such a move would put the first family and the hundreds of people employed in the complex.

On the south side of the White House, we have had temporary security barriers on E Street since the September 11<sup>th</sup> terrorist attacks. No Washingtonian or visitor can be pleased with the sight, that more resembles a construction site than the White House, but it was not until ten years later that designs were being reviewed for improvements to the area, and even then, it was considered imperative that the ultimate design be one that allowed for the street to be reopened in the future for vehicles.

I can also tell you that there have been numerous studies conducted over the years by the Secret Service and, at the Service's, request to test and explore options to address vulnerabilities of concern to the White House complex. Without going into inappropriate detail in this open setting, I can tell you that among other considerations, these were motivated in part by concerns about the inadequacy of the current White House fence as an outer perimeter for the complex given the ability of an individual or group of individuals to quickly scale it and be on the White House grounds. While many improvements have been made, especially over the last decade, to the security of the White House complex – many unnoticeable to the public – there have been several priority improvements desired by the Secret Service that have not been possible in light of other considerations or given the level of funding provided to the agency for such capital improvements.

Let me be clear: I am not in any way trivializing the importance of these other considerations. As a security professional, there have almost always been things I would have liked to do for security purposes, but could not give other factors or limited funding; that is always going to be true. We must always keep in mind that the White House, like the United States Capitol, is an important symbol for the American people. It is obviously critically important that it be kept safe, but that security must be accomplished in a way that does not jeopardize the very values that we seek to protect and that these buildings themselves indeed symbolize these beliefs. I just ask that you keep this in mind when looking at this particular incident, and examining how something could have happened or how it could be and should be prevented in the future.

Finally, I want to make sure the Committee is aware of another fundamental principal on which the Secret Service's, and in fact any good security organizations', protective methodology is based. In the military, this is called "defense in depth", but in law enforcement we usually just

refer to it as multi-layered security. When it comes to protecting the President or the White House complex, there are many layers of protection through which an attacker must travel in order to achieve their desired objective and to pose an ultimate threat to the person or thing that is the target. Again, without going into too much detail, I would respectfully suggest to the Committee that the White House fence is just one layer of that multi-tiered strategy. Specialized tactical units on the White House grounds are another one. A breach of the fence and the arrival of an individual at the steps of the White House is unacceptable and must thoroughly be examined to find opportunities for improvement and to prevent it from happening again; we would all be mistaken if we did not consider it as such. We would be mistaken if we mistook this event as an indication that the President or other protectees were or could have been in imminent danger or that this incident demonstrates a lack of proficiency or commitment on the part of these men and women in protecting our nation's leadership. Having said that, I would certainly welcome, as I know the Secret Service would, any support the Committee is able to offer in terms of resolving remaining roadblocks to improvements to the security of the White House complex.

Again, I thank the committee for the invitation to be here with you today, and I look forward to answering your questions.

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
Witness Disclosure Requirement – “Truth in Testimony”  
Required by House Rule XI, Clause 2(g)(5)

Name: W. Ralph Basham

---

1. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) you have received since October 1, 2011. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.

See Below

---

2. Please list any entity you are testifying on behalf of and briefly describe your relationship with these entities.

I am a founding partner at Command Consulting Group, LLC, a Washington-DC based Homeland and National Security Advisory firm. More information can be found at [www.commandcg.com](http://www.commandcg.com).

---

3. Please list any federal grants or contracts (including subgrants or subcontracts) received since October 1, 2010, by the entity(ies) you listed above. Include the source and amount of each grant or contract.

United States Trade Development Agency (USTDA) – CCG competed for and was awarded a USTDA funded training and assessment program aimed at improving security at Haiti’s Port of Prince International Airport. Amount: \$150,000 USD

Analytic Services Inc. – CCG supported the Homeland Security Studies and Analysis Unit in an analysis of alternatives related to SBInet and future technology deployments along the southwest border. Amount: \$8,007.19 USD

U.S. Customs and Border Protection Office of Investment Analysis, DHS – A CCG subsidiary company supported a prime contractor in a feasibility study of using biometric technology to improve data and information capture for travelers leaving the United States. Amount: \$80,700.00 USD

Office of Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) – A CCG subsidiary company supported a prime contractor in execution of Aviation Domain Intelligence Integration Element (ADIIE) program. Amount: \$18,000.00

CCG is currently pursuing other U.S. Federal Government and International Government opportunities as both a prime and subcontractor. If the Committee requests further information on these current / future pursuits, please direct them to Tom Hoare at [thoare@commandcg.com](mailto:thoare@commandcg.com).

---

*I certify that the above information is true and correct.*

Signature:

*W. Ralph Basham*

Date:

*9/29/14*



## W. RALPH BASHAM

Mr. Ralph Basham has one of the most distinguished and diverse backgrounds in law enforcement and homeland security in the world today. Over the course of his 38 year career in federal law enforcement, he served in senior leadership positions at four of the eight operational components in what is now the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and did so as a Senior Executive Presidential appointee in the Clinton, George W. Bush and Obama administrations.

Most recently, Mr. Basham led an agency of over 53,000 employees as Commissioner of U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP), the nation's largest law enforcement agency and the largest operational component of DHS with overall responsibility for the border security of the United States. During his tenure as Commissioner, CBP embarked on an ambitious initiative to secure the border using state of the art technology such as ground based radar systems, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), and an increased intelligence infrastructure. Mr. Basham led the agency's successful effort to double the size of the Border Patrol and modernized the way in which law enforcement agencies and the intelligence community work together in their efforts to screen passengers and cargo entering the United States. Mr. Basham led CBP through a period of unprecedented growth and intense public scrutiny on issues like immigration and border security, and managed the challenges of securing the global supply chain and enforcing trade laws while facilitating legitimate commerce. He also oversaw the rapid deployment of billions of dollars worth of assets and tactical infrastructure along the nation's borders.

Prior to becoming Commissioner of CBP, Mr. Basham served as the Director of the United States Secret Service (USSS), where he had overall responsibility for the security of the President, Vice President, all living former Presidents and their families, visiting heads-of-state, and a multitude of government facilities and installations. He also oversaw the Service's important investigative functions in the area of financial crimes and fraud. Mr. Basham began his career as a rank and file Secret Service Agent and would later lead a field office and the Vice Presidential Protective detail before serving as Director from 2003 until 2006.

In the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks, Mr. Basham was named as the first Chief of Staff at the U.S. Transportation Security Administration (TSA). In this capacity, he designed and implemented the Federal Government's takeover of security operations at airports nationwide.

From 1998 until 2001, Mr. Basham served as the Director of the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center (FLETC), which operates the primary training facilities for nearly every federal law enforcement force in the United States.



### CONTACT

WASHINGTON DC

E: [wrbasham@commandcg.com](mailto:wrbasham@commandcg.com)

T: (202) 207-2930

F: (202) 449-3493

Commissioner, U.S. Customs  
and Border Protection

Director, U.S. Secret Service

Chief of Staff, U.S.  
Transportation Security  
Administration

Director, Federal Law  
Enforcement Training Center