

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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Opening Statement

Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

Hearing on "DOJ IG: Handling of Sexual Harassment and Misconduct Allegations"

April 14, 2015

Set forth at the beginning of the Inspector General's report is a well-known doctrine for law enforcement officers: "Given the nature of their work, federal law enforcement employees are held to the highest standards of conduct and must be accountable for their actions both on- and off-duty."

Although this tenet should be obvious, it bears repeating here today. The Inspector General's report details conduct that is deplorable for anyone, let alone law enforcement officials serving the United States of America.

The report describes allegations that a Colombian police officer "arranged 'sex parties' with prostitutes funded by the local drug cartels for these DEA agents at their government-leased quarters."

Although the Inspector General's report describes activities between 2005 and 2008, last night our Committee obtained new documents showing that some of these allegations were made far earlier—and some date back as early as 2001.

In response to the Committee's request, the DEA has now produced to the Committee 88 internal reports issued by its Office of Professional Responsibility (OPR). One of these reports in particular—Case Number 2012-0085—goes into great detail about these allegations. However, the agency has warned that releasing the entire report could "expose complainants, witnesses, and victims," so we must summarize its findings today.

This new internal report details years of allegations—beginning in 2001—that portray DEA agents as completely out of control. They appear to have fraternized with cartel members, accepted lavish gifts, and paid for prostitutes with no concern for the negative repercussions or security vulnerabilities they created.

This new internal report describes not one or two isolated incidents, but literally dozens of parties with prostitutes in which DEA agents used government funds and government offices.

Mr. Chairman, my staff prepared a summary of this new internal report, and I ask unanimous consent that it be included in the hearing record.

This new internal report details a truly breathtaking recklessness by DEA agents who are sworn to protect our country.

Today I want to know how this egregious misconduct could have continued for so long—for the better part of a decade—without being addressed. The head of this agency, Michele Leonhart, is here with us today. Given her extended tenure at the DEA during the same timeframe of these abuses, we will have very direct questions for her.

Administrator Leonhart was nominated by President Bush in 2003 to serve as Deputy Administrator of the DEA. She began serving as Acting Administrator in 2007, and President Bush nominated her to serve as Administrator in 2008. She was nominated again by President Obama and confirmed by the Senate in 2010.

The Inspector General's report finds that "DEA supervisors treated alleged sexual misconduct and sexual harassment as a local management or performance-related issue." It also finds that when Administrator Leonhart learned about these allegations, her agency imposed extremely light penalties. For example, when she was informed about wild parties involving prostitutes, she "counseled the Regional Director for failing to report the allegations."

One critical question for Administrator Leonhart is what women who work in these law enforcement agencies must think. With only counseling sessions and suspensions of two weeks or less for misconduct like this, what incentive do women employees have to report sexual harassment by their supervisors?

On Friday, the Attorney General sent a letter to the Committee outlining steps to address these issues, including reexamining the security clearances of those involved, reviewing DEA procedures for investigating misconduct, and prohibiting the solicitation of prostitution regardless of whether it may be legal overseas. These steps are critical, but they are clearly long overdue if the first instances of this misconduct occurred in 2001.

These problems transcend politics. On March 27, Chairman Chaffetz and I wrote a bipartisan letter to the DEA announcing our investigation, and we are fully committed to working together to investigate these incidents, how the agency responded, and whether additional steps are needed to help prevent this misconduct from ever happening again.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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