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ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

### Hearing on "White House Perimeter Breach: New Concerns About the Secret Service"

September 30, 2014

We begin today's hearing with an obvious premise—no individual should be allowed to scale the fence of the White House, sprint across the North Lawn, and burst into the residence of the First Family with a weapon. Our goal today is also clear—to determine how this happened and make sure it does not happen again.

This recent incident unfortunately causes many people to ask whether there is a much broader problem with the Secret Service. Last night, the *Washington Post* reported that Omar Gonzalez made his way into the East Room, much further than the Secret Service previously disclosed.

Another report in this weekend's *Post* about a shooting incident in 2011 raises even more questions about the competency and culture of this agency. What concerns me most about this report is that agents said they were hesitant to raise security concerns with their supervisors. The Secret Service is supposed to be the most elite protective force in the world, yet four days went by before they discovered that the White House had been shot seven times.

Then, in 2012, there was the prostitution scandal in Colombia. Although it had little to do with tactical protection issues, it seriously damaged the agency's credibility.

Today's witness, Julia Pierson, was appointed as the Director of the Secret Service last year to help restore the agency's standing. She has had a distinguished 30-year career with the agency, and to her credit, she immediately ordered an internal review and agreed to testify.

With respect to the recent incident, I have key questions for the Director that I know are shared by many people across the country.

Did the Secret Service have specific protocols for handling this type of perimeter breach? If so, were those protocols followed in this case? If they were followed, do they need to be changed in light of what happened? If the protocols were not followed, why were they not followed? And how can we have confidence that they will be followed in the future?

I also want to understand what happened prior to this incident. Gonzalez was arrested in Virginia two months earlier, on July 19. Mr. Chairman, I would like to enter into the record an inventory sheet that was provided to us by the Virginia State Police. It lists the contents of his car, which included a small arsenal of 11 firearms—including sniper rifles and a sawed-off shotgun. It also included a map of Washington D.C. with “a line drawn to the White House.”

According to the Virginia State Police, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives concluded that there was no information in Gonzalez’s history that prohibited him from owning these firearms. Yet, he was severely mentally ill, and a military psychiatrist reportedly treated him for post-traumatic stress disorder and paranoid schizophrenia.

I hate to even imagine what could have happened if Gonzalez had been carrying a gun instead of a knife when he burst inside the White House. That possibility is extremely unsettling.

Today, our work faces two challenges. First, the Secret Service has not yet completed its internal review. I understand that the Director will provide us with a status update, but the final results are not yet in.

Second, some of the information is classified, so we cannot discuss it in public. The last thing we want to do is give people like Gonzalez a road map for how to attack the President or other officials protected by the Secret Service. This does not mean the Committee cannot obtain this information. The Director sent a letter on Friday offering not only to testify here today in this public setting, but also to provide all of us with a classified briefing. The Chairman has now agreed to hold this classified session in a separate room directly after this hearing concludes.

Let me close by making a final point. This is not a Democratic issue or a Republican issue, but an American issue. The vast majority of men and women who serve in the Secret Service are dedicated, experienced public servants who are willing to lay down their lives for their country. They have an extremely difficult job, and like others in similar positions, they are required to make instant life-or-death decisions in extremely stressful situations.

Last year, for example, the Capitol Police shot and killed an unarmed woman with a one-year-old girl in the back seat of her car. Some praised their quick response, and others criticized their actions. But they acted based on their first-hand experience right here in the Capitol when another deranged individual burst through the doors and killed two Capitol Police officers.

The Secret Service has a high-profile job, but it is critically important, and it requires accountability, so the spotlight is rightly on their actions today.

I look forward to the testimony, both in the open and classified sessions, and I thank the Chairman for calling this very important hearing.

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