

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

WASHINGTON, DC 20515-6143

MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
MINORITY (202) 225-5051
<http://oversight.house.gov>

Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings Hearing on "U.S. Secret Service: Holding the Protectors Accountable" March 24, 2015

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for holding today's important hearing.

I too am disappointed that we will not hear from the other Secret Service witnesses the Committee invited to testify here today. Director Clancy, I have great respect for you and your service to our country. Your job is crucial, your reputation is exceptional, and your desire to protect your agents and officers against unwarranted intrusion is admirable.

But we wanted to speak with these witnesses for a very simple reason: according to your own testimony, you did not know about this incident until five days after it happened.

With all due respect, I have to say how disappointed I was with your initial letter on Friday. It simply announced that you would be the only witness today, without providing any reason for the other witnesses not testifying.

No other Committee is doing more on this issue than ours, and we are trying to conduct our work in a responsible, bipartisan manner. But when we receive a response that rejects our requests with no explanation at all, it is difficult to view that response as respectful, which I know is not your true intent.

For these reasons, I was heartened to receive your letter yesterday, in which you outlined your specific concerns with the public testimony of agents charged with protecting the President. I also appreciate your offer to work with this Committee to examine other ways to provide us with the information we need to fulfill our constitutional oversight responsibilities.

Of course, we all understand that there is an ongoing Inspector General investigation of this incident. The IG has informed us that he will be moving quickly and should be able to answer key questions in weeks, not months.

We recognize that the Inspector General's investigation could result in recommendations for disciplinary action, and the last thing we want to do is interfere with that process. That is why the Chairman and I have committed to consulting with the IG directly before taking any significant action that could impact his work.

With respect to the incident on March 4, we need to understand the facts. As the Committee has begun to obtain more information, we have been able to determine that some of the initial allegations were inaccurate. For example, it does not appear that anyone “crashed” into the White House gate.

At the same time, we have been able to substantiate other claims. Director Clancy, my most significant concern has always been—and remains today—that you did not know about this incident and that nobody at the entire agency told you about it. Five days went by while you were in the dark.

Last year, when the former Director of the Secret Service, Julia Pierson, sat in that same chair you are now sitting in, I warned her that she was not getting the information she needed to do her job. I alerted her that agents and officers believed they were better off staying silent instead of raising their concerns up the chain. And I lamented an environment at the Secret Service that would allow these deficiencies to continue. Yet, that appears to be exactly what happened here.

I believe that when the chain of command is broken, there is no command. And when there is no command, there is vulnerability.

Let me make something crystal clear. This is not business as usual for me. This is not just another oversight hearing about just another agency. I admire this President greatly. I admire him for the challenges he has overcome to be President, the accomplishments he has achieved since, the principles he stands for on behalf of our country, and the contributions he has made to our nation’s history. I do not want anything to happen to him under my watch—or under yours.

This must not be about politics, headlines, or unnecessary disputes that contribute nothing to the solution. We must come together in a non-partisan way to take concrete steps—both publicly and privately—to turn this agency around.

The agents and officers of the Secret Service risk their lives on behalf of this nation, and they deserve an agency they can be proud of. We owe it to them to eliminate this culture of complacency, to ensure meaningful accountability and reform, and to provide the resources, tools, and training they need to fulfill their critical mission.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to the Director’s testimony.

Contact: Jennifer Hoffman, Communications Director, 202-226-5181.