

# 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 "Flying Under the Radar: Securing Washington D.C. Airspace"**

**April 29, 2015**

Unlike previous hearings our Committee has held with the Secret Service and the DEA—which involved misconduct by individual agents—today's hearing presents a different question: how should our nation deal with the relatively new and evolving threat of unmanned or small manned aerial vehicles entering the airspace over our nation's capital?

This is a question of technology and policy—both of which are rapidly evolving. In this case, I do not personally believe the answer is to condemn the Capitol Police for not shooting down the gyrocopter. I also do not believe we should rush to criticize federal agencies charged with responding to this threat.

Instead, I believe the best course of action is to work collaboratively with both the Capitol Police and these federal agencies to understand the threat, and to strongly support their ongoing efforts to enhance current technologies, many of which are classified.

So I thank the Chairman for calling today's hearing on this critical issue. I completely understand the frustration expressed by him and others about this incident. I share that frustration.

The airspace around our nation's capital is supposed to be the most restricted in the world. Yet a postal worker from Florida was able to fly his gyrocopter through 30 miles of restricted airspace before finally landing on the Capitol lawn.

In this case, the individual was only trying to make a peaceful demonstration, but we might not be so fortunate in the future. It takes almost no effort to imagine what could have been. What if he had weapons? What if he were carrying a bomb?

On the flip side, it is also my understanding—based in part on the classified briefings we have received—that this individual is incredibly lucky to be alive today. The next person who tries something this stupid may not be so lucky.

I would like to thank all of the witnesses for testifying here today on such short notice. I also want to thank you for providing briefings last week—both classified and unclassified. Your missions are extremely difficult, and the lives of people throughout the District depend on your success. I look forward to hearing from each of you in an effort to address this pressing situation.

We all agree that our paramount interest is the continued security of the airspace over the capital and addressing any possible breaches as effectively and efficiently as possible. This is a critical moment. We live in a dangerous world with complex, constantly evolving threats, so it is imperative that we are prepared to counter them.

In addressing these questions today, however, the last thing we want to do is give a roadmap to those who want to harm us. Obviously, we need to treat this information responsibly, and we do not want to highlight security vulnerabilities to would-be attackers.

Out of an abundance of caution, I want to make 100% sure that all of our witnesses understand that we do not want you to discuss any sensitive information in this public forum.

Many of you have raised concerns about holding a public hearing on this topic, and I understand your concerns. After discussions with the Chairman and his staff, we have agreed to set up a separate, cleared room to address any sensitive issues that may arise.

The bottom-line is that you are the experts, and we will defer to you on what can be discussed in this public setting. If our questions call for sensitive information, please let us know, and we can reconvene in the closed setting to address those issues.

Our sole purpose today is to help you counter the threats we face, not to expose our nation's capital to greater danger by exposing operational details or security vulnerabilities.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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