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Opening Statement

Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

Hearing on "The Security Failures of Benghazi"

October 10, 2012

I believe we should conduct a thorough and responsible investigation into the attack on the U.S. mission in Benghazi. We need to carefully investigate allegations that have been made over the past week, and we need to run them to ground before we jump to conclusions.

Let me start by thanking Secretary Clinton and the State Department for cooperating fully with the Committee. They agreed to all of our witness requests, they offered additional witnesses beyond those requested, they promptly organized interviews with Department officials, and they have been collecting documents sought by the Committee.

Today, there are several specific allegations I would like to ask the witnesses about.

For example, Eric Nordstrom, a former regional security officer in Tripoli, told the Committee there should have been five Diplomatic Security agents in Benghazi. In other interviews we conducted yesterday, we learned that there were, in fact, five agents in Benghazi on the day of the attack. Should there have been even more? We will ask him about this, and we will ask the State Department for its views as well.

Another witness, Lt. Col. Andrew Wood, has said he believes that a military unit stationed in Tripoli should have had its term extended because of security concerns in Libya. Yesterday, we learned that this team was extended—not once, but twice. Should it have been extended a third time? We need to ask, where else was it needed, and were its functions being fully served by others on the ground by the time it left the country?

We should listen carefully to these and other allegations, and we should listen just as carefully to the responses. I am disappointed to say, however, that although the Chairman claims we are pursuing this investigation "on a bipartisan basis," that has not been the case.

For example, the Chairman concealed the Committee's interactions with Col. Wood until Friday night, when he appeared on national television. The Chairman then refused requests to make Col. Wood available so we could speak with him, ask him basic questions, and prepare for today's hearing. We could not even get his phone number.

The Chairman has withheld documents that were provided to the Committee, which is a violation of House rules. And he effectively excluded Democrats from a congressional delegation to Libya this past weekend.

It is a shame that they are resorting to such petty abuses in what should be a serious and responsible investigation of this fatal attack. The problem is that these actions deny Members of this Committee the ability to effectively investigate this incident.

In contrast, on the Senate side, every Member of the Foreign Relations Committee—Democrats and Republicans alike—joined in a bipartisan letter to the State Department requesting information on the attack.

So, what do we do today? My goal is to try, in some way, to put this toxic partisanship behind us and focus on the security of our personnel overseas. The Chairman has said that our Committee will examine not only the Libya attack, but security at our posts across the Middle East. Mr. Chairman, I fully support this effort.

And if this is our goal, we have to examine the funding. The fact is that, since 2011, the House has cut embassy security by hundreds of millions of dollars below the amounts requested by the President. The Senate restored some of these funds, but the final amounts were still far below the Administration's requests. And they were far below the levels we enacted in 2010.

We can do better, and I would like to ask the Chairman to join me in doing so. Mr. Chairman, I ask you to join me in calling on our leaders in the House to immediately consider a supplemental funding bill to restore funding for embassy security that was cut by the House over the past two years.

According to the Joint Committee on Taxation, we could save \$2.5 billion per year just by eliminating the tax break for oil companies. Even Republicans now agree that we should do this, including Governor Romney. We could fully replenish these embassy security accounts with just a fraction of that amount.

Restoring our commitment to embassy security would make a real difference to thousands of Americans who serve our country overseas, often in extremely dangerous circumstances.

From this day forward, it is my hope that our Committee will thoroughly investigate this matter in a truly bipartisan manner because our dedicated foreign service personnel and our nation deserve nothing less.

Thank you.

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