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ONE HUNDRED THIRTEENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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### Opening Statement Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

#### Hearing on "Reviews of the Benghazi Attack and Unanswered Questions" September 19, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I want to begin by recognizing that Mrs. Patricia Smith and Mr. Charles Woods are here to testify about their sons who were killed in Benghazi, Sean Smith and Tyrone Woods. Nobody can fully comprehend the anguish they are suffering. I know from my own personal experience that losing someone so young, and so promising, is one of the most difficult things we ever experience in life.

Sadly, there are now other mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, sisters and brothers who are also grieving after the shootings this week at the Washington Navy Yard, less than a mile from here. Our hearts go out to those families as well.

In addition, although Ambassador Stevens' family was not able to attend today, they sent a written statement, as did Glen Doherty's sister. If they haven't been already, I ask that these statements be placed in the official hearing record.

I look forward to hearing that testimony, and I hope we can learn more about who these brave individuals were, their hopes and dreams, and their service to our country. I believe one goal of today's hearing should be to honor them as heroes. Because that's exactly what they are. They believed in this nation, and they devoted their lives to protecting it.

There are other ways our nation should honor these men. First, we must hunt down those responsible and bring them to justice. Progress on this front may not always be visible to the public. But as our nation demonstrated in the relentless, worldwide, ten-year pursuit of Osama bin Laden, the United States does not forget. And I believe I speak for the entire Committee when I say that our commitment to this goal is bipartisan and unwavering.

Another way to honor their memories is to obtain information about what happened in Benghazi. Chairman Issa issued a report earlier this week that provided some new information, but unfortunately he chose not to work with any Democratic Committee Members. So today, I offer my own report that I would like to provide to the Committee and the witnesses. As this report explains, our goal was to provide detailed information in response to some of the specific questions that have been raised relating to the attack.

Our report is based on a review of tens of thousands of pages of classified and unclassified documents, 16 transcribed interviews, and one deposition.

Our report provides new details about the intense and terrifying week last September when events at embassies and consulates around the world put U.S. personnel on hair-trigger alert for days. These included events not only in Benghazi, but also in Khartoum, Sana'a, Tunis, Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad, where crowds of thousands marched, set fires, and breached U.S. compounds repeatedly. Mr. Chairman, I ask that our report be made part of today's official hearing record.

Another critical way we should honor the memories of these heroes is by implementing the recommendations and reforms that were put forth to improve the security of our diplomatic and military forces around the world. This is the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform. I hope we can all agree, on a bipartisan basis, that we should implement these recommendations as effectively and efficiently as possible.

On this point, Ambassador Pickering explained to the Committee during his deposition that, because of his own personal and professional bond with Ambassador Stevens, he viewed his service on the Accountability Review Board (ARB) as "a debt of honor." He said, "Chris gave me two wonderful years of his life in supporting me in very difficult circumstances." He also said, "I owed him, his family, and the families of the other people who died the best possible report we could put together."

However, Ambassador Pickering also said he was "deeply concerned" that although previous ARBs were "excellent in their recommendations," the "follow-through had dwindled away." We cannot let that happen under our watch.

I would like to make one final point about the ARB. There have been some extremely serious accusations that the ARB was a "whitewash" and a "cover-up," that it "doesn't answer any real questions," and that its "sole function" was "to insulate Hillary Clinton."

Let me respond as directly as I can. Based on all of the evidence obtained by this Committee, this Benghazi review was one of the most comprehensive ARB reviews ever conducted. I have seen no evidence—none whatsoever—to support these reckless Republican accusations. To the contrary, witness after witness told the Committee that the ARB's work was "penetrating," "specific," "critical," "very tough," and the "opposite of a whitewash."

One reason I requested today's hearing four months ago was to give Ambassador Pickering and Admiral Mullen an opportunity to respond directly to these unsubstantiated accusations. I am glad they are finally being given that opportunity. Our nation owes them and the other Board Members profound thanks for their dedication and service to our country.