

Oversight and Government Reform Full Committee Hearing 9/30/2014

White House Perimeter Breach: New Concerns about the Secret Service

Chairman Darrell Issa Preview Statement

The United States Secret Service was an elite law enforcement agency. The men and women of the Secret Service were highly regarded, highly respected, and highly trusted. The country has placed great faith and trust in the Secret Service. The agents and the uniformed division officers of the Secret Service have the monumental task of protecting of our Nation's presidents — past, present, and future. They do so honorably – and not without considerable personal sacrifices. They ensure the safety of the first and second families; the safety of foreign dignitaries; the safety of White House facilities; and all who occupy them. A history of misbehavior and security failures, however, has blemished this trust.

On September 19, Omar Gonzalez jumped the North Fence, ran across the White House lawn, up the steps of the North Portico and into the front door of the White House. He was armed with a three-inch serrated knife. He entered through an unlocked door, passed the staircase to the Presidential residence, and into the East Room of the White House. Secret Service officers only subdued him after he was inside the White House. An intruder walked in the front door of the White House. That is amazing – and unacceptable. Commonsense tells us this was a significant security failure -- not an instance of praiseworthy restraint

Inexplicably, Omar Gonzalez breached at least “Five Rings” of security on September 19th. The White House complex is supposed to be one of the most secure facilities in the country, if not the world. So, how on earth did this happen? This failure has once again tested the trust of the American people in the Secret Service – a trust already strained by a string of recent scandals.

From allowing paparazzi-craving-reality-TV “stars” to crash a State Dinner, to engaging with prostitutes in Cartagena, and excessive drinking in the Netherlands, the Secret Service has encountered some serious problems recently. Just this weekend, there are new reports of a mishandled response in 2011 to a gunman who sprayed bullets into the White House, causing nearly \$100,000 in damage.

Morale at the agency appears in decline. In light of the recent break-in, we have to ask whether the culture at the Secret Service and declining morale have impacted operational security. We will be asking tough questions today. The appointment of Director Pierson brought the hope that the agency would reclaim its noble image – but recent events show the troubles facing the agency are far from over.

Director Pierson has some challenging questions to answer. How could Mr. Gonzalez scale the fence and why didn't officers immediately apprehend him? How was he able to sprint 70 yards, almost an entire football field, without being intercepted by guards inside the fence line? Why

didn't security dogs stop him in his tracks? What about the SWAT team? Why was no guard stationed at the front door of the White House? And why was the door left unlocked?

The Secret Service must show us a clear path forward to regain the public trust. The purpose of today's hearing is to gain answers to the many questions plaguing the Secret Service that this incident has brought to light. Today we will hear from experts on the agency and security protocols – both foreign and domestic. We will also hear from Secret Service Director Julia Pierson on the incident and the agency's plan for improvement.

Americans face real danger as they serve our interests abroad – especially our personnel stationed at embassies in places of great turmoil and unrest. The danger we face as a nation, be it from ISIL or other enemies, is not limited to foreign soil. I recognize and appreciate that the brave men and women of the Secret Service put their lives on the line every day – they are prepared to die to protect what we as a nation hold sacred. They serve our great nation with dedication and professionalism. And I thank them for their service.

However, the fact is - the system broke down on September 19 as it did when the Salahis crashed a state dinner in November 2009, or when Oscar Ortega-Hernandez successfully shot at the White House on November 2011, or when agents engaged in prostitution in Cartagena in April 2012, or when agents showed terrible judgment and got drunk in the Netherlands in March 2014.

Whether deficient procedures, insufficient training, personnel shortages, or low morale contributed to the incident, this can never happen again. We simply cannot allow it.