



One Hundred Thirteenth Congress  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Committee on Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20515

October 1, 2014

The Honorable Barack H. Obama  
President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Ave  
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President,

As the Ranking Member of the Committee on Homeland Security, I have serious concerns about the operational gaps and lapses by the United States Secret Service (“Secret Service”) during your Administration. When it comes to the security of you and your family, I believe operational gaps and lapses are unacceptable. I have spoken with Director Julia Pierson personally about not only recent operational lapses, but also about necessary reforms that are needed within the Secret Service. Unfortunately, I am unconvinced that the current Director can continue to effectively lead the Secret Service. I arrived at this view after taking into account information on incidents under her watch as well as the failure of the Secret Service to present information to Congress in a timely, complete, and forthcoming manner regarding these incidents.

The record of serious operational lapses by the Secret Service during your Administration cannot be overlooked. In November 2009, three uninvited individuals were able to bypass heightened security and attend a White House State Dinner honoring Indian Prime Minister Monmohan Singh and have access to you, Vice President Biden, and other prominent domestic and international figures.<sup>1</sup> In Summer 2011, the Special Agent in Charge of the Washington Field Office diverted agents away from patrolling the Ellipse and other areas throughout the perimeter of the White House to LaPlata, Maryland, 30 miles from their assigned post, to perform so-called “welfare checks” in the neighborhood of the then- Secret Service Director’s assistant.<sup>2</sup> This past weekend we learned from the *Washington Post* that in November 2011, the Secret Service dismissed a series of gunshots that struck the White House as “backfire” from a vehicle and, as a

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<sup>1</sup> Amy Argetsinger and Roxanne Roberts, “Secret Service Confirms Third Crasher at White House Dinner,” *The Washington Post*, January 5, 2010.

<sup>2</sup> Carol D. Leonning, “Secret Secret Service Agents Pulled off White House Patrol to Help Protect a Top Official’s Aide,” *The Washington Post*, May 10, 2014.

result, ordered officers on the scene to “stand down”.<sup>3</sup> Yesterday, there was news that on September 16th, just three days before the lone actor intruded the White House, the Secret Service failed to prevent an armed man from riding in an elevator with you during your visit to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.<sup>4</sup> America has been fortunate that these missteps and operational lapses have not resulted your being harmed. Relying on luck cannot be an operational strategy.

When Director Pierson was selected to succeed Mark Sullivan, I was cautiously optimistic that she could address the longstanding cultural problems within the Secret Service, since she has served for 30 years within the Secret Service. However, it is now evident that the Secret Service needs a seasoned law enforcement professional who is not a product of the Secret Service to bring about needed reforms. The next leader of the Secret Service—on both a temporary or permanent basis—needs to be a qualified, steadfast, and determined change agent.

That new leader needs a strategy to get the Secret Service on track while addressing the longstanding cultural problems within the organization. On my Committee, Chairman Michael McCaul is preparing a proposal of a Blue Ribbon Commission with outside experts to tackle the challenge of putting such a strategy together. It is an idea that probably warrants consideration, especially if such an undertaking can be done in an expeditious manner.

Thank you in advance for your timely consideration of these views. I welcome the opportunity to speak with you about the future of the Secret Service.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON  
Ranking Member

cc: The Honorable Jeh Johnson

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<sup>3</sup> Carol D. Leonning, “Secret Service Fumbled Response after Gunman Hit White House in 2011,” *The Washington Post*, September 28, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Crabtree, “Exclusive: Secret Service Missed Man with Gun in Elevator with Obama”, *Washington Examiner*, September 30, 2014.