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October 3, 2014

The Honorable Jeh Johnson
Secretary
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The September 19, 2014, incident in which an armed intruder, Omar Gonzalez, scaled the fence and entered the North Portico of the White House highlighted weaknesses in the executive mansion's security structure. The incident—along with a string of recent scandals—called the culture at the United States Secret Service into question.

At a September 30, 2014, hearing titled “White House Perimeter Breach: New Concerns about the Secret Service,” Secret Service Director Julia Pierson testified before the Committee in an open session, followed by a closed session. During the hearing, Committee Members expressed bipartisan apprehension about a series of dangerous security breaches over the past several years, as well as troubling reports involving protocol failures, technology lapses, training reductions, and internal cultural issues that may discourage agents from reporting security concerns to their superiors.

Following the hearing, Director Pierson resigned, but serious questions predated her tenure as director, and her resignation by no means resolves them. While we honor Ms. Pierson's 30 years of service to the nation, we agree that the Secret Service needs new leadership to address the grave issues it currently faces. We look forward to working with interim Acting Director Joseph Clancy as he returns to the Secret Service to guide the agency forward.

Recognizing that the Secret Service is at a critical juncture, at the hearing Members and panelists expressed their strong belief that now is the time for an independent, comprehensive evaluation from outside the Department. Thank you, therefore, for your recent announcement that the Department will name a panel of independent experts to examine the September 19 incident and related issues. Your initiative is an important step in assuring that missteps at the Secret Service do not continue. Congress and the American people look forward to receiving the results of this comprehensive external review, as well as the results of the inquiry you tasked Deputy Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas to lead.

As you assemble a panel of independent experts from outside the Secret Service and the Department of Homeland Security, we believe that the panel must conduct a broad assessment of the agency—well beyond the September 19 incident. Identifying cultural problems within the Secret Service is no small task. As this process begins, we believe there are three key actions this panel should take:

- (1) The panel should review not only recent security lapses, but the full range of management, personnel, training, and cultural issues that contribute to the root causes of these security failures.
- (2) The panel should examine the process by which the Secret Service communicates with Congress, the press, the American people, and the President himself, to ensure that information the agency provides is accurate and timely.
- (3) The panel should make an unclassified version of its report and recommendations available to Congress and the public. Any classified version of the report should be submitted to Congress in an appropriate manner.

The sooner this process begins, the quicker the agency can implement recommended reforms and restore its reputation. The frequency and gravity of recent security breaches highlight significant flaws within the Secret Service's culture, which the independent investigation must examine in depth. Identifying internal management weaknesses and offering significant recommendations are vital in order to reform the agency's culture. By taking these fundamental steps, the Secret Service will begin to rebuild its credibility, which, as you know, is of paramount importance as a deterrent against would-be attackers.

As both Republican and Democratic Members expressed during our hearing, this issue is not partisan. Rather, we are working together on a bipartisan basis to identify solutions and help the Secret Service obtain results. Thank you for your prompt attention to and leadership in this matter.

Sincerely,



Darrell Issa
Chairman



Elijah E. Cummings
Ranking Member