

Opening Statement

Chairman Jason Chaffetz

(As prepared)

Reforming the United States Secret Service is not a partisan issue. Ranking Member Cummings and I have presented a united front on this issue and I look forward to continuing this important work with him.

The most important mission of the Secret Service is to protect the President and his family. However, a litany of recent mishaps raises major concerns.

In 2011, no one recognized shots were fired at the White House until bullet holes were discovered by maintenance staff. It has been well publicized that Secret Service agents engaged in misconduct in Cartagena, Amsterdam, and Miami.

In September of last year in Atlanta, a security contractor with an arrest record and armed with a gun rode in an elevator with the President, completely unbeknownst to the President's detail. A few days later, a man armed with a knife jumped the White House fence, made it past the Secret Service, and inside the White House.

And now, on March 4th, the second-in-command of the President's detail drove his car through a crime scene involving a bomb threat while the President was in the White House.

This has to stop. The Secret Service has a zero fail mission to protect our President. This is especially true for the President's Protective Detail, or "PPD." We need to understand why these incidents keep happening.

This Committee requested the Special Agent in Charge of the PPD, Robert Buster, attend a bi-partisan closed-door briefing regarding the incident.

Director Clancy said no.

The Committee requested the supervisors on duty before and during the incident of March to testify today.

Director Clancy said no.

We asked Director Clancy to turn over video footage of the incident.

He said no.

In our closed briefing last week, Director Clancy was unable to adequately answer questions about the events of March 4th. Instead, he asserted that by referring the matter to the Inspector General he was unable to ask any questions of his own. But Congress is also doing an investigation.

By refusing to allow the witnesses we invited to testify – with first-hand knowledge of the incident – Director Clancy is keeping Congress and the American public in the dark. On top of that, the Secret Service has missed every deadline to provide this Committee with information – with no legitimate explanation as to why.

It is unclear why Director Clancy is choosing at the start of his tenure to be so unhelpful to Congress. While I was hopeful Director Clancy would assist Congress in understanding how we can restore the agency to its prior stature that does not appear to be the case.

The March 4th incident is concerning on three fronts: (1) the interference in a crime scene by senior Secret Service personnel; (2) allegations involving decisions, communications, and dispositions of senior Secret Service personnel; and (3) the agency's apparent botched response to a bomb threat while the President was in the White House.

Although the Secret Service has refused to provide video footage of the incident, the Metropolitan DC Police Department has. I would like to thank Police Chief Lanier for her swift response to this Committee's request.

Before we watch the video, I want to talk about what we are going to see:

- On March 4th, at 10:24PM, a woman drove her vehicle to a security gate outside of the White House fence line and left a package she claimed was a bomb.
- Secret Service agents at the scene confronted the suspect but were unable to apprehend her.
- The package sat unattended as traffic drove by.
- It took 11 minutes for the Secret Service to call the Metropolitan Police Department bomb squad.
- *For 17 minutes*, traffic continued through the intersection and several pedestrians walked within feet of the potential bomb.
- When they finally did call, they failed to mention to Metro PD that it was an actual bomb threat, rather than just a suspicious package.

Let's take a look at the video now [show video].

An agent followed the suspect in her car but was mistakenly called off the pursuit when the Secret Service identified a wrong car as the suspect's. Thirty minutes after the woman fled the scene the Secret Service issued a lookout for her vehicle to local law enforcement.

Thirty minutes.

The suspect was finally arrested three days later – 90 miles away – by a different police agency on unrelated charges. The day before she was arrested, she was interviewed by a Secret Service agent but they claimed they were unable to arrest her and instead cancelled the lookout alert for the woman.

Back at the White House on March 4, two senior Secret Service agents, including Mark Connolly – the President’s second-in-command on his Protective Detail – disrupted the crime scene.

These agents placed themselves, their colleagues, and the President and his family in potential danger by driving their government vehicle through a barricade within feet of a potential bomb.

Under the Secret Service’s policy, video footage of the incident should be retained; however, most of the footage has mysteriously gone missing. I find this highly suspicious.

In a briefing last week, Director Clancy and Deputy Secretary Mayorkas played Committee Members two tapes of the incident that showed the same few seconds from different angles. Though limited, this footage clearly showed the agents purposefully moving a barricade aside with their car.

I want to set aside the concern that Secret Service is only maintaining video footage of one of the most important buildings in our country for only 72 hours.

There are issues related to national security, prosecution, and a basic ability to learn from past instances. Based on Secret Service policy, video footage of *this* incident should nevertheless have been retained.

An agency spokesperson told CNN: “In the event of an operational security incident at the White House complex, specific video footage is maintained for investigative and protective intelligence purposes.”

Yet Director Clancy and Deputy Secretary Mayorkas only showed two very limited views of the incident to this Committee. Does a potential bomb near the White House not qualify as “an operational security incident”? If a potential bomb doesn’t qualify, then what does?

These tapes should have been retained and this Committee intends to find out why they weren’t. We were only shown seconds of video for an incident that lasted more than an hour.

Director Clancy: Today we expect answers.

To help you prepare for the hearing today, my staff reached out to your congressional affairs office to let you know what subjects we would be covering today. Your staff was fully briefed on what we expect you to know.

I want to let *you* know that “I don’t know” is not going to fly in today’s hearing.

We look forward to you answering our questions and providing clarity on what happened on March 4th.