

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

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Opening Statement Ranking Member Elijah E. Cummings

Hearing on “Oversight of the Secret Service” November 15, 2016

Thank you very much. Since the beginning of this Congress, I have joined with the Chairman to conduct a comprehensive investigation of the Secret Service—the good, the bad, and the ugly. Working together, we issued a bipartisan report last year that documented the cultural problems at the agency and detailed specific incidents of abuse by agents who went astray.

But we also did something else extremely important. We documented how staffing levels at the Secret Service dropped off a cliff after the significant budget cuts imposed by sequestration. Let me read to you what our report said: “The crisis began after 2011 when the number of employees began to decline sharply, and the decline continued across all categories of employment.” One of the top causes we identified was the “significant cuts imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011.”

That was the bipartisan, unanimous finding of this Committee. Through sequestration, Republicans in Congress slashed the budget of the Secret Service, and we are still feeling the consequences of those budget cuts on the men and women who devote their lives to protecting the President and many other officials.

After recognizing this massive problem, we also proposed a bipartisan solution. In our bipartisan report, we made 29 joint recommendations, and one of them read as follows:

“Congress should ensure that Secret Service has sufficient funds to restore staffing to required levels, and Secret Service should ensure that it has systems in place to achieve these goals.”

Unfortunately, the problem we now face is that some apparently feel that these words mean little, and they will not support additional funding for the Secret Service beyond this year to increase staffing or even to keep the staffing they have.

As we all know, 2016 has been a year of extraordinary demands—and strain—on the Secret Service. Recent news reports indicate more than 1,000 Secret Service agents—one third of agents—have worked so many hours that they “maxed out” their annual overtime and salary

and are prohibited by current law from receiving any additional overtime pay. Some agents started working overtime for free as early as June and are exceeding the pay cap by 50 or 60 thousand dollars.

But this happens every four years. Every presidential campaign year, significant hours of overtime are required for the Republican and Democratic national conventions, and for around-the-clock protection of the presidential candidates and their families. This year, the Secret Service had to provide security at two additional major events, the United Nations General Assembly and the Nuclear Security Summit.

As our bipartisan report showed, Secret Service agents have been leaving at historic rates. One senior agent explained how agents had their lives “completely disrupted and don’t see any benefit from that sacrifice.” He added: “We’re losing people, recruiting has been tough to do as not many want to do this job and we are doing nothing to incentivize people to apply or stay.”

The men and women of the Secret Service put their lives on the line every day because they love our country. They endure high-stress, 16-hour work days; they are away from their families for weeks at a time; they miss birthdays, holidays, and time with their children. They make extreme sacrifices—and they should get paid for the time they work.

How in the world can we expect to address the major recruitment and retention challenges at the Secret Service if we are not even paying them for the hours they serve?

Raising the salary caps only for 2016 is not enough. This is not a new issue, it comes up every election cycle, and we need a permanent solution. For these reasons, I am introducing a bill that would create a permanent fix by raising the annual pay cap for every presidential campaign year. It is Congress’ duty to consistently fund the Secret Service’s most mission-critical areas, and we must take action.

Finally, I am very encouraged that the Secret Service has been making tremendous progress implementing our recommendations and those of the Protective Mission Panel. Just this morning, the Department of Homeland Security Inspector General issued a new report commending the Secret Service on the significant strides they have been making. However, the report warns that full implementation will “depend heavily on adequate funding and staffing.” That is a warning for us here on this Committee and every Member of Congress.

I urge my Republican colleagues to support my bill and to show the American people that this Committee can do more than just talk—we can act to address the problems we identify.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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