



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

February 2, 2009

The Honorable Richard L. Skinner  
Inspector General  
Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528

Dear Inspector General Skinner:

The Committee has become aware of information that raises significant concerns about the Secret Service's protective operations and security procedures relating to the Inauguration of President Obama. Specifically, the *Washington Post* last week described several security vulnerabilities relating to screening operations, protection perimeters, and information sharing which may have directly impacted the safety of the President and other Secret Service protectees<sup>1</sup>. Among other things, the *Post* reported that half-a-dozen supporters who underwent security screening and were seated within close proximity to Secret Service protectees "mingled with public crowds but were never again checked for firearms or explosives". Similarly, guests screened at an off-site location reported that their secure buses could have been infiltrated because there were no mechanisms to prevent unscreened persons from joining previously screened guests and boarding a secure bus into the innermost security perimeter. Making matters worse, guests detailed their concerns in real time on popular public forums such as Twitter.com – which were accessible by anyone with an Internet connection – with apparently no response from the Secret Service.

The *Post* further noted that security standards were lax in less open forums. As a rule, the Secret Service conducts criminal history checks on guests and staff that will be in close proximity to a protectee at intimate functions. More than one event attendee, however, told the reporter that they had brought along un-vetted guests into isolated areas that may have required credentials and preclearance. This allegation, which arguably is a violation of accepted policy, is a cause for alarm. If these accounts are true, it would appear that any enterprising terrorist or other criminal could have easily infiltrated even the most secure areas on Inauguration Day with potentially disastrous results.

In the interest of ensuring the integrity of Secret Service protective operations, and the security of our nation's leaders, I request that you audit the Secret Service protective security plans for the Inauguration; investigate and identify any deficiencies in

<sup>1</sup> Aaron Davis, "Security Around Obama Alarms Some VIP Donors," *Washington Post*, January 30, 2009

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security operations, including but not limited to communications and information sharing between security personnel, deviations from security plans, as well as any mitigating circumstances or justifications; and if appropriate, critique these operations and make recommendations to strengthen Department of Homeland Security and Secret Services practices.

Thank you in advance for your attention to this urgent matter. Please direct any questions to Cherri Branson, Chief Oversight Counsel for the Committee on Homeland Security, at (202) 226-2616.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Bennie G. Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Bennie G. Thompson  
Chairman  
Committee on Homeland Security

BGT/tl