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Chairman Towns Stands by Decision to Investigate, Hold Hearings on Failed Terror Attack

Blasts committee Republicans' grandstanding, politicizing security of the American people

WASHINGTON – Chairman Edolphus “Ed” Towns (D-NY) today wrote committee Democrats and Ranking Member Darrell Issa (R-CA) to put to rest any misunderstanding about his commitment to conducting a thorough review, and holding appropriate hearings, on the Christmas Day attempted terrorist attack on American soil. In the letter, Chairman Towns criticizes a recent correspondence from committee Republicans, filled with “confusion and vitriol”, that misconstrues his plan to examine the failed attack.

Earlier this week, Chairman Towns wrote Ranking Member Darrell Issa (R-CA) about his concerns with shortcomings in the nation’s homeland security system that the December incident revealed, and detailed the initial steps he is taking to examine existing problems. Chairman Towns also stated in his letter that he wants to “meet and discuss our shared policy goals” in order to achieve the most appropriate hearing that meets the concerns of both Democrats and Republicans. Unfortunately, the committee Republicans have so far demonstrated an unwillingness to meet the chairman’s request.

Chairman Towns concludes his letter by stating, “In my 27 years on this committee, I have worked in a bipartisan fashion on any number of issues and will continue to do so. I hope to conduct a bipartisan review that is characterized by problem solving and holding people accountable, rather than scoring political points... I ask all members of the committee – including the minority members – to support me in that goal.”

Text of the letter below.

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Friday, January 8, 2010

Dear [Colleague] ,

I am responding to recent correspondence from Republican Members of the Committee. They appear to have misread my recent response to Mr. Issa describing my approach to reviewing the Christmas Day attempted terrorist attack.

In that letter, I stated my commitment to conducting a thorough review and holding appropriate hearings on the most recent attempted terrorist attack on our nation, in coordination with the other committees in the House. I also proposed that Mr. Issa and I meet and discuss how to craft an effective and bipartisan oversight strategy. Instead of taking yes for an answer, they wrote a lengthy screed that is not responsive to my letter and makes various baseless allegations. I do not want to speculate whether this indicates a failure in reading comprehension, or a willingness to politicize the security of our citizens.

Their primary demand seems to be that the committee hold "immediate hearings" that require testimony from "every government agency." I do not understand the purpose of holding hearings prior to conducting any investigation, except to provide a platform for uninformed grandstanding that occupies the time of officials who are busy keeping our nation safe. I cannot support that approach to issues of homeland security, but am planning to hold hearings that feature testimony of senior Administration officials on how critical failures happened and how to prevent them from recurring.

It is also unfortunate, but telling, that they chose to air their grievances in a letter that was released to the press, rather than raising them with me directly. In my 27 years on this committee, I have worked in a bipartisan fashion on any number of issues and will continue to do so. I hope to conduct a bipartisan review that is characterized by problem solving and holding people accountable, rather than scoring political points. Although that is made difficult by the confusion and vitriol evidenced in recent correspondence, I ask all members of the committee – including the minority members – to support me in that goal.

Sincerely,

Edolphus Towns
Chairman