

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****Statement of Chairman Bennie G. Thompson*****The United States Secret Service and Presidential Protection: An Examination of a System Failure***

January 20, 2010 (WASHINGTON) – Today, Committee on Homeland Security Chairman Bennie G. Thompson (D-MS) delivered the following prepared remarks for the full Committee hearing entitled *The United States Secret Service and Presidential Protection: An Examination of a System Failure (continued)*:

“Today marks the third time this Committee has met to discuss security breaches at the White House State Dinner.

At our first hearing, Secret Service Director Mark Sullivan testified. He admitted that the Secret Service bore the sole responsibility for safeguarding the White House grounds and took responsibility for his agency’s failure.

The Salahis were invited to appear at that hearing but they did not appear.

So the Committee met again. At that meeting, we voted to issue a subpoena to compel the Salahis to appear.

Countless media reports identified them as the couple who attended the White House State Dinner without appearing on the invited guest list. In multiple public appearances, the Salahis have said that they were able to enter the White House without triggering the suspicion of Secret Service officers stationed at checkpoints.

This Committee, charged with overseeing homeland security, has an important interest in understanding how two ordinary people were able to defeat this security system.

Yet, despite wide exposure in the media, the Salahis steadfastly refuse to speak informally or formally with this Committee.

Although they have decided to appear today, we have been told that they will invoke their Fifth Amendment protections. We respect the Constitution and therefore we must respect that decision.

As a substitute, their lawyers have offered to appear and speak for them. However, those offers are not satisfactory. These lawyers were not at the State Dinner and have no first hand knowledge of the facts. At best, their statements could only be second-hand representations.

We believe the Salahis have relevant factual information. We look forward to discovering those facts when their current legal situation resolves itself.

But regardless of what fate awaits the Salahis, this Committee must continue its oversight of the Secret Service. The safety of the President must be taken seriously.”

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