

STATEMENT OF
SENATOR SUSAN M. COLLINS

HSGAC HEARING ON US SECRET SERVICE
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Mr. Chairman, let me begin my remarks by stating my strong belief that the vast majority of the men and women of the US Secret Service are professional, disciplined, dedicated, and courageous. They do an extraordinarily difficult job extraordinarily well.

The honorable conduct of the many true professionals of the Service stands in stark contrast to the misconduct that occurred in Colombia last month, on the eve of the President's visit there. The timing makes the appalling behavior all the more troubling not only to me but also to the majority of Secret Service personnel past and present.

I will not dwell on the details of the incident since they have already been so widely reported and I'm sure will be discussed by Director Sullivan. The behavior is morally repugnant, and I certainly do not want to downplay that fact. My concerns, however, go beyond the morality of the agents' actions.

First, this reckless behavior could easily have compromised individuals charged with the security of the President of the United States. And second, the facts so far lead me to conclude that, while not at all representative of the majority of Secret Service personnel, this misconduct was almost certainly not an isolated incident. Let me discuss both of these concerns in more detail.

It is basic "Counter-intelligence 101" that Secret Service personnel and others holding sensitive positions of trust in the U.S. government should avoid any situation that could provide a foreign intelligence or security service or criminal gangs with the means of exerting coercion or blackmail. Yet, two of the primary means of entrapment -- sexual lures and alcohol -- were both present here in abundance.

While the preliminary investigation has shown that none of these men had weapons or classified material in their hotel rooms, they still could easily have been drugged or kidnapped, or had their liaisons with these foreign nationals used to blackmail them, thereby compromising their effectiveness and potentially jeopardizing the President's security. They willingly made themselves potential targets not only for intelligence or security services, but also for groups like the FARC or drug cartels.

There is absolutely no excuse for, or factor that can mitigate, such recklessness. The Service has tightened up its regulations and oversight to try to ensure that this never happens again.

Second, Mr. Chairman, the facts suggest to me that this likely was not just a one-time incident.

If only one or two individuals out of the 160 male Secret Service personnel assigned to this mission had engaged in this type of serious misconduct, then I'd think this was an aberration. But that's not the case; there were 12 individuals involved . . . 12. That's eight percent of the male Secret Service personnel in-country, and nine percent of those staying at the *Caribe* Hotel.

Moreover, contrary to the conventional story line, this was not simply a single, organized group that went out for a night on the town together. These were individuals and small groups of two and three -- 11 individuals from the *Caribe* and one from the Hilton -- that went out at different times to different clubs, bars, and brothels, but who all ended up in similar circumstances.

In addition, two of the participants were supervisors -- one with 22 years of service and the other with 21 -- and both married. That surely sends a message to the rank and file that this kind of activity is tolerated on the road.

The numbers involved, as well as the participation of two senior supervisors, lead me to believe that this was not a one-time event. Rather, the circumstances unfortunately suggest an issue of culture.

And it may well be that it's a culture that spans agencies. The Secret Service and the Department of Justice Inspector General are continuing to investigate yet another Secret Service Agent and at least two DEA personnel who entertained female foreign nationals in the Cartagena apartment of one of the DEA agents.

Moreover, the evidence thus far suggests that this was not a one-time incident.

And, of course, the original reports out of Colombia also alleged misconduct by about a dozen members of our armed forces.

Again, I want to stress that the vast majority of our law enforcement and military personnel are real heroes -- and I deeply appreciate the dangers that those deployed overseas face every day. Given this apparent question of culture, however, I am pleased that the DHS Inspector General will be examining the culture of the Secret Service to see if there is something systemic that led to the Columbian incidents. The IG will look at hiring, training, and similar components, including the administration of discipline -- to see if the Service follows its own rules and applies them uniformly to all Agents. I will follow this investigation closely.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank Director Sullivan and the Acting IG for their willingness to deal openly and directly with this Committee

over the past six weeks as we have attempted to better understand the ramifications of this scandal. And thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this important hearing.