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House of Representatives

May 5, 2010

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The Honorable Barack H. Obama
The President
The White House
Washington DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

In light of the attempted terrorist bombing in Times Square in New York City, I urge you again to implement four bipartisan steps that would help make our country safer. If we fail to learn the lessons of the attempted attacks on Christmas Day and Times Square, we will continue to repeat the same mistakes that compromised our preparation for and response to these two incidents. The latest attack underscores the need for the rapid adoption of bipartisan solutions that strengthen our national security.

As you know, I have repeatedly urged the administration to bring back the co-chairs of the 9/11 Commission – Lee Hamilton and Thomas Kean – for a six-month review of the progress that has been made in implementing the commission’s recommendations. To date, I have seen no effort by the administration on this front.

I have spoken with Lee Hamilton and he believes this is a good idea. In fact, Mr. Hamilton underscored the need for this when he told ABC News yesterday that, “the 9/11 commission recommended that you had to have biometric evidence, documentarian evidence of people coming in and exiting [the country.] We’ve done a pretty good job on the first part of it people entering the country. But with regard to those exiting the country we simply have not been able to set up a system to deal with that and it showed in this case.”

Given our failure to prevent both alleged terrorists -- Faisal Shahzad and Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab -- from boarding their flights, it is critically important that our transportation security structure have strong leadership and coordination. In both cases, the alleged terrorists slipped through security despite appearing on the “no fly” list.

I have repeatedly urged the administration to support legislation to establish a more professional and independent administrator of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA), by setting a 10-year term, akin to the appointment process for the director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). In fact, I introduced legislation, H.R. 4459, in early January to do this. After two withdrawn nominations, the position remains vacant and the administration continues to oppose efforts to professionalize this position.

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In the wake of the attempted Christmas Day bombing, there were many serious questions regarding the administration's deployment of the new High Value Detainee Interrogation Group (HIG). Five months later, these same questions surround the administration's response to the Times Square attack. *The Washington Post* noted in its editorial today, "Nor has [the administration] said whether its High Value Interrogation Group (HIG) – a group of law enforcement and intelligence experts specially trained for terrorism cases – was up and running and deployed in the Shahzad case."

I have repeatedly urged the administration to collocate the HIG at the National Counterterrorism Center to facilitate information sharing and cooperation among intelligence agencies. Again, I have seen no effort by the administration to do so.

Perhaps most importantly, I have repeatedly urged the administration to create a "Team B" of outside advisors to bring "fresh eyes" to U.S. counterterrorism strategy. The team would represent a "new approach to counterterrorism" which focuses not just on connecting the dots of intelligence, but which seeks to stay a step ahead in understanding how to break the radicalization and recruitment cycle that sustains our enemy, how to disrupt their network globally and how to strategically isolate them. This would help us better anticipate the type of threats that occurred on Christmas Day and in Times Square.

Counterterrorism experts, including respected Georgetown University professor Bruce Hoffman, have publicly endorsed this proposal. They understand the need for a group of outside experts to challenge assumptions across the intelligence community to help us better prepare for future attacks. In light of the increasing pace in attempted attacks on U.S. soil, I believe this should be implemented as quickly as possible.

I cannot understand why the administration continues to refuse to adopt these proposals. In light of the latest attempted attack, I urge your action on these proposals – each of which would receive broad bipartisan support from the American people.

Best wishes.

Sincerely,

Frank R. Wolf
Member of Congress

**I URGE YOU TO ACT
ON THIS. THANK YOU.**