

Secret Service director under scrutiny for diversity initiatives after Trump assassination attempt

Just the News

7/16/2024

The director of the U.S. Secret Service, appointed by President Joe Biden, has come under scrutiny from Republicans over her support for diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives within the agency.

This comes after the hallowed protective agency failed to stop an assassination attempt on GOP candidate Donald Trump at a rally in Pennsylvania that left one audience member dead and three injured, including Trump himself.

In the face of the security failure, Director Kimberly Cheatle refused to resign as the head of the agency but promised that the “buck stops” with her.

"The buck stops with me. I am the director of the Secret Service, and I need to make sure that we are performing a review and that we are giving resources to our personnel as necessary," she said in an exclusive interview with ABC News on Monday.

Cheatle has come under scrutiny from Republican critics, who argue that her efforts to diversify the elite agency dedicated to the protection of the nation's highest officials created vulnerabilities.

“I think the the honorable thing to do this step aside, at some point there, my concern is, is that the focus of the mission is not is not the top priority with her,” GOP Rep. Barry Loudermilk said on the *“Just the News, No Noise”* TV show on Monday.

“DEI, you know, social justice these things have crept into every element of our government. And I don't have any concrete evidence on this other than what I've heard, but I'm afraid that some of these social issues have taken precedent within the Secret Service,” he added, invoking a common criticism from Republicans.

Cheatle, who previously served in the Secret Service for 28 years, has not concealed her plans to diversify the agency by hiring more women. She returned to the agency as the director after a three-year stint as an executive at PepsiCo, responsible for global security.

In the first television network interview after she became director, Cheatle highlighted her efforts to diversify the Secret Service and described her goal of achieving 30% female recruits by 2030.

The spokesperson for the Secret Service confirmed to RealClearPolitics in April that the agency had signed on to the 30x30 initiative, a national initiative to increase the representation of women in policing fields nationwide.

"I'm very conscious as I sit in this chair now, of making sure that we need to attract diverse candidates and ensure that we are developing and giving opportunities to everybody in our workforce, and particularly women," Cheatle told CBS News.

Her comments came amid a recruitment challenge in the Secret Service, which the director acknowledged. According to CBS News, the Secret Service's rate of departure was 48% in 2022. This high turnover rate may result in part from the long hours and stressful work conditions that have plagued the agency for years.

The Washington Post reported that, in 2015, the Secret Service ranked last among federal law enforcement agencies in the influential "Best Places to Work in the Federal Government," published by the Partnership for Public Service.

The presence of several female agents at former President Trump's Pennsylvania rally attracted attention from conservatives and the media. Videos made the rounds on social media showing those agents were unable to fully shield Trump, who was much taller. One other agent appeared to struggle to holster her weapon as Trump was loaded into his SUV.

"Look, I'm not sure about who the individuals are on the individual detail, Secret Service, but I can tell you under this Biden administration, the one thing I've seen is massive DEI hires," GOP Florida Rep. Cory Mills said on Fox News. "And I can tell you when you primarily, when you primarily go after DEI," Mills continued, "you end up with D-I-E."

The contrast was made even more apparent, some commenters said, by Trump's Secret Service detail at the first night of the Republican National Convention, which began Monday in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Following on the heels of the horrifying incident at the rally Saturday, Trump's protective detail was made up entirely of male agents who surrounded the former president as he made his way through the crowds on the convention floor.

"After nearly getting assassinated while being protected by short women who didn't know how to holster their guns, Trump's secret service detail was back to being a bunch of big dudes last night," Clay Travis, founder of OutKick.com and conservative talk radio host, posted to X Monday.

One former senior FBI official with 24 years of experience told the New York Post that the female agents appeared to be overwhelmed during the attempted assassination.

“The women I saw up there with the president — they looked like they were running in circles. One didn’t know how to holster, the other one didn’t seem to know what to do, and another one seemed not to be able to find her holster,” former Assistant Director Chris Swecker said, according to the Post. “DEI is one thing. Competence and effectiveness is another, and I saw DEI out there.”

Proponents of women in law enforcement roles pushed back on the criticism coming from conservatives and former officials about the diversity push. “We’ve had critical incidents for centuries with men leading, and there’s never been a question that because of their gender they shouldn’t lead,” Kym Craven, the executive director of the National Association of Women Law Enforcement Executives, told The New York Times.

“The incident itself will be under review, and the incident will stand for itself. Whether changes needed to be made, mistakes happened—that’s not for me to judge in any way. But the discussion around gender and that because someone is a woman, they should not lead an agency—that conversation just should not be happening at all,” she added.

The Secret Service did not respond to a request for comment from Just the News.

When the House Oversight Committee in May began an investigation into standards at the Secret Service, the agency spokesperson also pushed back on claims that diversity was weakening its ranks.

“U.S. Secret Service employees, whose work is vital to the continuity of government, are held to the highest professional standards. At no time has the agency lowered these standards. The Secret Service received a letter today from Chairman James Comer, and we will work with the House Oversight Committee to provide a timely response,” spokesman Anthony Guglielmi said at the time.