

The Honorable Todd M. Keil

Opening Remarks before the House of Representatives, Select Committee on Benghazi

Washington, DC

September 15, 2014

Thank you Chairman Gowdy, Ranking Member Cummings and distinguished Members of the Select Committee for inviting me to testify today about our Independent Panel Report on Best Practices in the aftermath of the tragic attack on the US Mission in Benghazi, Libya, and our insight regarding the implementation of our recommendations and related issues relevant to our report.

Our Panel was committed to identifying best practices from throughout the U.S. government, the private sector, non-governmental organizations, and international partners which can finally establish an effective risk management process in the Department of State, improve the security of U.S. diplomatic facilities abroad and enhance the safety of Department of State and foreign affairs agencies' personnel not only in high-risk areas, but globally. We identified 40 recommendations to achieve this goal. We continue to stand behind our report in the strongest possible terms, and believe that each of the 40 recommendations and the supporting narratives, which were derived from well-known and established best practices, provide a clear roadmap for security management enhancements throughout the Department of State.

Mr. Chairman and distinguished members, I spent a career of almost 23 years as a Special Agent with the Bureau of Diplomatic Security in the Department of State. As a result of my years of service, I am uniquely familiar with the history and, most importantly, the operating culture both within the Bureau of Diplomatic Security and the Department of State. As our Panel interviewed hundreds of people in the US and abroad, and gained valuable ground truth from our travel to 10 countries during our work, including numerous high threat locations, I couldn't have been more personally and professionally proud and heartened, and my fellow Panel members were equally impressed, by hearing and witnessing the dedicated and admirable work of the men and women of the Diplomatic Security Service. Every day around the world, the DS team faces extreme challenges and unpredictable risks to provide a safe and secure environment for the conduct of U.S. foreign policy, and they do so with distinction. The men and women of the Bureau of Diplomatic Security are truly dedicated public servants and are owed the gratitude of the American people for their service to our great nation.

As we state repeatedly throughout our report, best practices will not save lives unless they are resourced, implemented and followed. Almost 14 years ago, a number of very similar recommendations were made after the East African embassy bombings and little has been accomplished by the Department since then to improve its approach to risk management. While we are pleased our report has finally been officially released by the State Department, along with

an Implementation Fact Sheet, we are disappointed with the decision not to implement recommendations 1 and 13.

In meeting earlier this year with Deputy Secretary Higginbottom and Assistant Secretary Starr, we were encouraged by their candor and support for our recommendations and their stated intent to adhere to the recommendations in our report. In light of the long history of such reports and recommendations to the Department of State, and with a continuing sense of responsibility, we voiced our concerns in a recent letter to Deputy Secretary Higginbottom, both for those recommendations not implemented and those that apparently rely on pre-Benghazi processes and procedures to demonstrate or achieve implementation. Clear the smoke and remove the mirrors, now is the time for the Department of State to finally institutionalize some real, meaningful and progressive change. Words and cursory actions by the Department of State ring hollow absent transparency, and verifiable and sustainable actions to fully put into practice the letter and the intent of our recommendations, which will facilitate diplomacy and safeguard the selfless Americans who carry out our national security priorities around the world. The Department of State owes it to those people who have given their lives in service to our country and to those employees who continue to serve our country in some very dangerous locations around the world to continue to identify and implement risk management best practices.

Finally, we urge the Department to institutionalize the process of outside and independent counsel on risk management best practices sooner than 2016. The Accountability Review Board recommended that this be an annual process, and we concur that this remains a critical need of the Department and should begin as soon as possible. In our view, this is a decisively important step the Department must take to demonstrate transparency and insure a continuing dialogue on security best practices with and input from outside, independent experts regarding operating in high threat and challenging international locations.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.