

OPENING STATEMENT OF CHIEF KIM C. DINE, UNITED STATES  
CAPITOL POLICE

APRIL 15, 2015 GYROCOPTER INCIDENT

Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

U. S. House of Representatives

April 29, 2015

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to discuss the event that occurred on Wednesday, April 15<sup>th</sup> and the actions taken by the members of the United States Capitol Police. I will begin by providing a timeline of the events and will gladly answer any questions that you may have. It is important to note that this case is an on-going criminal investigation.

On Wednesday, April 15<sup>th</sup> at 12:59 p.m., an individual from the Tampa Bay Times sent an email to the USCP Public Information Officer stating that a local man was flying a gyrocopter as part of a protest and was trying to land on the West Front. This individual inquired if the USCP was aware of the flight and if permission had been obtained. No time or date information was provided regarding the flight.

At 1:00 p.m., this same individual called the USCP Command Center and stated to an officer that he had information about a man who was going to fly a “drone”

onto the Mall and the West Front of the Capitol. He stated that he had called the USSS and they advised him to call the USCP. He also stated that this man, who he identified as Douglas Hughes, had received permission from the USSS and the USCP and he was calling to confirm the permission was granted. No time or date information was provided regarding the flight during this telephone call either. The officer advised this individual that she was not aware of any approvals to land a drone. They were then transferred to a sergeant in the Command Center and this individual repeated what he had told the officer except now he referred to the aircraft as a gyrocopter. The sergeant advised that no approval existed for a gyrocopter to land on Capitol Grounds. The caller advised the sergeant that Hughes's live feed could be seen on Hughes' website which he provided. At this point, the conversation concluded and during the conversation no mention was made that the landing was imminent.

At 1:07 p.m., the USCP Public Information Officer responded to the email from the Tampa Bay Times by immediately forwarding it to the Investigations Division. Concurrently, Command Center personnel went to the provided website but did not find the live feed noted by the individual from the Time Bay Times. The Command Center notified the Investigations Division and the Public Information Officer. As the Command Center was attempting to validate any prohibited

airspace overflight information with USCP staffed at the NCRCC, the gyrocopter landed at 1:23 p.m.

At 1:21 p.m., just prior to the landing, an officer posted on the Pennsylvania Avenue walkway on the West Front was approached by a reporter who asked if he had seen a helicopter yet. The officer stated he had not seen a helicopter and then consulted with another officer to determine if they were aware of any prohibited airspace overflights. During this discussion, the officers observed the inbound gyrocopter over Union Square nearly atop the Grant Memorial. The officers immediately notified Communications and subsequently reported the landing of the gyrocopter. This information was immediately broadcast over the radio for situational awareness and response.

USCP officers immediately assessed the threat in accordance with Department policy and training as USCP personnel quickly facilitated the movement of the public on the West Front away from the gyrocopter. Once the gyrocopter rotors stopped, USCP officers approached the subject and took him into custody. The subject did not resist and was compliant with police direction. A K-9 unit immediately approached and swept the gyrocopter and showed interest in the area of the engine and fuel compartment (which was expected). Incident Command

was established at 1:26 p.m., the West Front was closed and vehicular traffic was restricted on First Street between Constitution and Independence Avenues, along with Maryland and Pennsylvania Avenues to Third Street.

As this was occurring, the Investigations Division provided the commanders in the Command Center with information about the subject from an internet video publicizing the subject's ownership of the gyrocopter, his intentions to deliver a box of letters to Congress in reference to campaign finance reform, and his investigative history with both the USCP and the USSS. The Command Center notified the NCRCC of the situation.

While the K-9 sweep was occurring, a Capitol Division commander directed a brief lock down of the Capitol and of the CVC. When the lock down was announced via the radio, the Uniformed Services Bureau (USB) Commander (who was in the Command Center) consulted with the Incident Commander. The USB Commander then decided to lift the lock down of the Capitol based upon the following facts: the K-9 had not alerted on the body of the gyrocopter but had shown interest only in the area of the engine and fuel compartment; the suspect was in custody and compliant with directions; the size of the small package area of the gyrocopter was limited to two backpack-sized boxes; information provided by

the Investigations Division that the intent of the pilot was clearly expressed in his video; and the USCP had established a strong perimeter from the gyrocopter with distance from the Capitol. The exterior perimeters stayed in effect. Due to the extremely short time frame between the lockdown order and the direction to lift the lockdown, no messages were sent to the congressional community advising of the lockdown.

The USCP Hazardous Devices Section responded to this incident and at 1:36 p.m. utilized their robot to investigate the gyrocopter. Since the robot could not access the two boxes on the gyrocopter, at 2:21 p.m., Hazardous Devices Section personnel donned protective gear and took x-rays of the boxes. The gyrocopter was determined to be clear of any hazards at 2:57 p.m. Traffic cuts were subsequently released and the West Front remained closed until the crime scene could be processed and the gyrocopter removed.

It is important to note that while the USCP does not control the prohibited airspace over Washington, D.C., we do monitor this airspace 24/7, and we are directly linked to other federal agencies related to this controlled airspace. On April 15<sup>th</sup>, this gyrocopter did not register on radar as a threat and, therefore, was not raised as a concern among our federal partners. We take the monitoring of the

prohibited airspace very seriously which is why we have a designated airspace coordinator and have assigned liaisons at the NCRCC to provide immediate linkage to critical information regarding identified airspace threats. Information about identified airspace threats allows us to make informed decisions regarding the safety of our stakeholders and the Capitol Complex.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss the event that occurred on Wednesday, April 15, 2015. I am very proud of the professional and immediate actions taken by the members of the United States Capitol Police in addressing this incident. I would be happy to answer any questions the Committee may have at this time.

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As a means of background, in October of 2013, an officer assigned to the USCP Command Center was notified by the National Capital Region Coordination Center (NCRCC) that the United States Secret Service (USSS) had received information that an individual named Douglas Hughes was planning to fly a gyrocopter and land on the grounds of either the White House or Capitol. The USCP Threat Assessment Section coordinated with the USSS to have Hughes and his brother interviewed. The USCP conducted a telephone interview of the brother and the USSS interviewed Hughes in Florida. During his interview, Hughes denied any intent to fly a gyrocopter to the White House or the Capitol. The USSS advised the USCP that they did not believe that Hughes was capable of carrying out the action and in their opinion the brother may have been attempting to get Hughes in trouble because of a prior disagreement.

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When Douglas Hughes from Ruskin, Florida was removed from the gyrocopter, he was transported to the USCP Headquarters building for processing. On Thursday, April 16<sup>th</sup>, Hughes appeared in court. He was charged with operating an unregistered aircraft without a pilot's certificate (49 USC § 46306(b)(5) (three year felony)) and violating national defense airspace (49 U.S.C. § 46307 (one year misdemeanor)). As a condition of his release, Hughes has been ordered to Stay Away from the District of Columbia (except for court appearances), the U. S. Capitol, the White House, and has been ordered to house detention in his home in Florida with electronic monitoring. In addition, Hughes is prohibited from flying aircraft of any kind. The criminal investigation is ongoing.

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