

US Secret Service in 'crisis', congressional review says

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A congressional review of the agency tasked with protecting US President Barack Obama found that the Secret Service is "in crisis" and detailed high-profile security breaches that could have endangered the president.

"This report reveals that the Secret Service is in crisis," said Representative Jason Chaffetz, chairperson of the House Oversight Committee. "Morale is down, attrition is up, misconduct continues and security breaches persist."

Lawmakers spent a year investigating breaches at the agency after a man armed with a knife was able to scale the White House fence and make it inside the building before being stopped.

The report focused on several high profile security breaches, including a 2011 incident in which several shots were fired at the White House, Secret Service agents soliciting prostitutes in Colombia ahead of a 2012 presidential trip, agents allowing an uncleared, armed guard with a violent arrest history to ride in an elevator with Obama last year, and two inebriated agents who interfered in a bomb threat investigation on White House grounds earlier this year.

The report also found Secret Service directors had lied to Congress about the breaches.

It pointed to an expanding mission for the agency without an adequate expansion in resources and a staffing crisis.

"The agency's recent public failures are not a series of isolated events, but the product of an insular culture that has historically been resistant to change," the report concluded.

Lawmakers urged better funding for the agency and for it to adequately staff and said they believe new, outside leadership is needed to reform the agency's culture.

The Secret Service said it had received a copy of the report and "appreciates the work that went into it".

"Our leadership has long acknowledged that, in addition to its many successes, the Secret Service faces many challenges," the agency said in a statement that pointed to reforms it has undertaken in the last year.

Former Secret Service director Julia Pierson was forced to resign last year amid a series of security breaches that occurred both at the executive mansion and on Obama's trips.

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