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September 25, 2012

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On September 11, 2012 – the 11th anniversary of the terrorist attacks of 2001 – the United States diplomatic mission in Benghazi, Libya was assaulted by an armed force for nearly five hours. Killed in the attack were United States Ambassador J. Christopher Stevens, Foreign Service Information Management Officer Sean Smith, and diplomatic security officers and former Navy SEALs Glen Doherty and Tyrone Woods. Since the attack, the administration's statements regarding the details of the assault have appeared contradictory and confused.

On September 12th, the day after the attack, State Department Undersecretary Patrick Kennedy reported to congressional staff that the assault appeared to be planned because it was extensive, involved a "proliferation" of small and medium weapons, and targeted multiple locations. Yet the following Sunday, September 16th, United States Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice appeared on five morning talk shows to announce that the attack was "a reaction to a video that had nothing to do with the United States." She further affirmed that it was not "a pre-planned, pre-meditated attack" and that "it was a spontaneous reaction to what had just transpired in Cairo."

Ambassador Rice's statements directly contradicted the statements of Libyan President Mohammad el-Megarif, who declared that "[t]he idea that this criminal and cowardly act was a spontaneous protest that just spun out of control is completely unfounded and preposterous." Yet as recently as Wednesday, September 19th, White House Press Secretary Jay Carney affirmed Ambassador Rice's statements, declaring that there was still "no evidence of a preplanned or pre-meditated attack" and that he "made that clear last week" and "Ambassador Rice made that clear Sunday."

Despite these affirmations, later that same day Matthew Olsen, Director of the National Counterterrorism Center, testified before the Senate Homeland Security Committee that our diplomats "were killed in the course of a terrorist attack on our Embassy." The following day, Thursday, September 20th, Press Secretary Carney was compelled to admit that "[i]t is self-evident that what happened in Benghazi was a terrorist attack."

It appears that the administration is either unable or unwilling to admit that the assault on the United States consulate in Benghazi was a terrorist attack. Representative Mike Rogers (MI-8), Chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence, has publicly declared that Ambassador Rice's statement that the attack was a spontaneous reaction was untrue, as there was "no information that shows that there was a protest going on as you have seen around any other embassy at the time," and the assault on the consulate was "clearly designed to be an attack." Furthermore, last May an al-Qaeda affiliated terror cell, the Imprisoned Omar Abdul Rahman Brigades, claimed responsibility for an attack on the International Red Cross office in Benghazi. This same group claimed responsibility for bombing the gates of the United States consulate in Benghazi on June 5th – and even issued leaflets promising more attacks against the United States. Indeed, recent reports state that Ambassador Stevens was "worried about what he called the security threats in Benghazi and a rise in Islamic extremism" in the months before the attack.

Undersecretary Kennedy, Ambassador Rice, Director Olsen, and Press Secretary Carney have presented my constituents, fellow Members of Congress, and I with inconsistent and contradictory information regarding what transpired in Benghazi on September 11th. These statements are evidence of a hasty and poorly coordinated response to a deadly attack with grave implications for United States foreign policy – and the American people and policymakers in Congress deserve better.

I understand that collecting information regarding the attack is an evolving process, and after participating in a briefing by Secretary of State Clinton and members of the intelligence community, it is clear that the full picture of the events surrounding the attack are not yet fully known. I must, however, on behalf of my constituents and all those who are disturbed by the deaths of our diplomats, question the wisdom of issuing declarative statements regarding the attacks when so much has yet to be learned. The release of such incomplete information drives improper conclusions, misdirects anger, and could lead to policy changes that would undermine our diplomatic and military efforts abroad.

I therefore ask for an explanation of the administration's statements. I look forward to working with you to discover the full truth regarding these attacks.

Most Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Michael C. Burgess". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Michael" being the most prominent part.

Michael C. Burgess M.D.
Member of Congress