

## **White House Vetting of Individuals with Access to the President**

### **Introduction**

Since stories of its campaign finance improprieties first surfaced in the fall of 1996, the Clinton Administration has been forced to acknowledge again and again that it was inappropriate for particular unsavory individuals to have entered the White House or to have attended outside political functions involving the President or the Vice President.<sup>1</sup> The repeated instances of White House failure to weed out problematic prospective invitees in advance of their arrival suggested at least the existence of a fundamental deficiency in the White House's vetting process. The Committee has determined that the problem was, in fact, even more severe. Testimony of individuals familiar with the White House's creation and evaluation of its guest lists revealed that a process for vetting proposed attendees was essentially nonexistent. White House officials testified that they relied upon the United States Secret Service and the DNC to vet invitees to or attendees at political events. DNC officials likewise testified that they too principally relied upon the Secret Service to identify and remove undesirable individuals. The Secret Service, however,

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Deposition of Nancy Hernreich, June 20, 1997, pp. 67-68 (conveying President Clinton's opinion that the attendance with Johnny Chung of a delegation of Chinese businessmen at a March 11, 1995 White House radio address was "inappropriate" and that the White House "shouldn't have done that"); Kevin Sack, "From Restaurateur to Intimate at the White House," *New York Times*, Jan 4, 1997, p. A8 ("Mr. Trie escorted a leading Chinese arms dealer [Wang Jun] to a small gathering with Mr. Clinton. The President has since described the arms dealer's presence as 'clearly inappropriate.'"); Glenn F. Bunting & Ralph Frammolino, "Cash-for-Coffee Events at White House Detailed; Politics: Zeal to Raise Funds Transformed Once-modest Sessions into Major Money-makers, Accounts Indicate," *Los Angeles Times*, Feb. 24, 1997, p. A1 ("White House spokesman Davis also has conceded that it 'was not appropriate' for the president to sip coffee with Eric Wynn just a few months after his second conviction for penny-stock fraud.").

is charged only with identifying potential physical threats to the President, and makes no other determination as to the overall suitability of invitees. Whether through gross negligence or conscious design, the result of the absence of an organized vetting system was the same: too many unsavory individuals were allowed entrance to the White House and access to President Clinton.

### **White House Vetting Procedures During the 1996 Election Cycle**

The White House Political Affairs Office was the designated recipient of the DNC's proposed guest lists for White House fundraising coffees and other politically motivated events attended by the President or Vice President.<sup>2</sup> The Political Affairs Office was also supposed to serve as the point of contact for the White House's system for vetting guests at political events to ensure their "suitability."<sup>3</sup> Former Deputy Political Director Karen Hancox testified that she received the list of guests selected by the DNC for upcoming White House events by fax from

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<sup>2</sup> The White House Social Office played the primary, but essentially "functionary" role in the creation of guest lists for White House events. *See* Deposition of Ann Stock, June 12, 1997, p. 21. Ann Stock, who headed the Social Office, explained that representatives of the Political Affairs and other offices within the White House routinely submitted to Stock's office the names of individuals they recommend for invitation to unspecified future White House events, and each specific event's final guest list was compiled from the running list of submitted names. *Id.* Stock testified that her office played no role in vetting potential guests or deciding "who comes or who doesn't come." *Id.* She said that she assumes that prospective guests are vetted by the offices submitting the guests' names, but that she "could [not] care less" how the vetting is done. *Id.* at pp. 131-32. She testified that it is her understanding that an invited guest's criminal background would be caught by the Secret Service, which does a final review of an event's guest list before any guests are admitted to the White House. *Id.* at pp. 133-34; *see also* discussion of the role of the Secret Service, *infra*, footnotes 18 - 21 and accompanying text.

<sup>3</sup> *See* Deposition of Karen Hancox, June 10, 1997, pp. 55-56.

Richard Sullivan, the DNC's National Finance Director.<sup>4</sup> Hancox's typical practice involved absolutely no vetting of Sullivan's suggestions.<sup>5</sup> In fact, she testified that she "rarely ever look[ed] at the list of names" submitted by Sullivan, and instead simply directed that the names be forwarded to the appropriate offices for insertion into the President's briefing book and for clearance by the Secret Service.<sup>6</sup> Hancox took further steps *only* if Sullivan specifically requested that she check on the suitability of a particular name on the DNC's list.<sup>7</sup> In such an event, Hancox would contact the appropriate authorities to determine whether the tentatively proposed individual could remain on the guest list. Where the invitation of a foreign national was at issue, the appropriate authority was the National Security Council ("NSC").<sup>8</sup> If the NSC

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<sup>4</sup> Deposition of Karen Hancox, June 9, 1997, pp. 52 (coffees); *see also id.* at p. 109 (overnights); *id.* at p. 113 (movie events at the White House); *id.* at p. 115 (state dinners).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*, p. 53.

<sup>6</sup> *Id.* at pp. 53-54.

<sup>7</sup> *See, e.g., id.* at p. 70 ("Q: When would you call the NSC regarding attendees to coffees or other events. A: If Richard would call me up and ask me about a name. Q: Was there *ever* a time that you took it upon yourself to call the NSC regarding *any* attendees to any of the coffee events or any events that Richard Sullivan sent you lists for? A: *Not that I ever remember, no.*" (emphasis added)); *see also* Deposition of Doug Sosnik, June 20, 1997, pp. 167-68.

<sup>8</sup> *See* Deposition of Karen Hancox, June 9, 1997, p. 101. Hancox could remember only one instance in which she received a question about an prospective guest that was not prompted by that individual's foreign nationality. On that occasion, Sullivan asked Hancox to determine whether a particular individual was supportive of the President's health care policies. Hancox recalls contacting the White House's Office of Public Liaison to address Sullivan's concerns. *See id.* at pp. 101-02.

objected to the attendance of the proposed individual, Hancox's response was to contact Sullivan and have him rescind the invitation.<sup>9</sup>

Because the White House never raised "red flags" about his proposals unless he "proactively asked about" particular guests, Sullivan understood that the White House "did not conduct background checks" of his proposed guests, and that the obligation to weed out unsuitable individuals rested primarily with the DNC.<sup>10</sup> Sullivan, however, acknowledged a carelessness in the DNC's own vetting, as he testified that he operated under the "false sense . . . that truly bad things would have been picked up . . . by the Secret Service."<sup>11</sup> Sullivan therefore suggested that the only category of potential guests that he felt the need to raise with Hancox was "foreign nationals."<sup>12</sup>

It is clear, however, that even foreign nationals did not necessarily receive proper scrutiny under the White House's vetting "process." Hancox testified that Sullivan raised concerns about a total of fewer than twelve individuals,<sup>13</sup> and she has no recollection of discussing with Sullivan

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<sup>9</sup> See *id.* at pp. 104-05; see also Deposition of Doug Sosnik, June 20, 1997, p. 176. Hancox also testified that the responsibility rested entirely with Sullivan and the DNC to ensure that suspect individuals who had been identified and removed from an event on one occasion did not accidentally reappear on a subsequent list. Deposition of Karen Hancox, June 10, 1997, pp. 50-53, 62-63.

<sup>10</sup> See Deposition of Richard L. Sullivan, June 4, 1997, pp. 104-05.

<sup>11</sup> Deposition of Richard L. Sullivan, June 25, 1997, p. 85.

<sup>12</sup> See Deposition of Richard L. Sullivan, June 4, 1997, p. 109.

<sup>13</sup> Deposition of Karen Hancox, June 9, 1997, pp. 78-79; see also Testimony of Samuel R. (Sandy) Berger, Sept. 11, 1997, p. 48 ("[T]here were a number, but not a huge number of occasions in which the NSC was asked its judgment.").

or the NSC the propriety of White House appearances by several prominent foreign subjects of the Committee's investigation, including Arief Wiriadinata and a delegation of Thai businessmen who accompanied Pauline Kanchanalak to a June 18, 1996 coffee.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, Samuel "Sandy" Berger, Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, conceded to the Committee that "[t]here obviously were some situations where foreign individuals . . . were invited to meetings with the President where the NSC's judgment was not [sought]."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Deposition of Karen Hancox, June 9, 1997, pp. 72-74; *see also* the section of this report on the activities of John Huang at the Commerce Department and the section on Coffees, Overnights and other Fundraising Events, especially the discussion of Pauline Kanchanalak and the June 18, 1996 coffee.

<sup>15</sup> Berger testimony, p. 48. Berger also noted the President's determination that the existing vetting procedures were inadequate, *id.* at p. 47, and explained that the NSC had adopted procedures that would correct these inadequacies by requiring the input of NSC personnel every time a foreign national is invited into the White House. *Id.* at pp. 72-73; *see also* Memorandum from Samuel R. Berger to "All NSC Staff", June 13, 1997, pp. 1-3 (Ex. 1). After receiving significant criticism for acceding to a DNC request for a photograph with Eric Hotung, a Hong Kong businessman, British citizen and husband of a prominent DNC contributor, Berger, in Ex. 1, also clarified NSC policy with respect to meetings between NSC staff and individuals from outside of the U.S. government. After promising in September 1995 to contribute \$100,000 to the DNC, Hotung was granted a meeting with Robert Suettinger of the NSC, and a photo opportunity with Berger. *See* Memorandum from David Mercer to DNC Chairman Don Fowler, stating that "the Hotungs . . . will be contributing \$100,000" and that "[w]e will be helping to set up a meeting with the Hotungs at the [NSC]", Sept. 14, 1995 (Ex. 2); Schedule of Robert L. Suettinger indicating a September 9, 1995 meeting with Eric Hotung (Ex. 3); electronic mail message from Stanley Roth to Sandy Berger indicating that Fowler requested a photo opportunity for the "fabulously wealthy" Hotung with Berger, Oct. 3, 1995 (Ex. 4). Berger testified that he was not aware at the time of the photograph that the Hotungs were contributors or even that the request was related to the Hotungs' contacts with the DNC. Berger testimony, p. 24. Berger did acknowledge, however, that he knew that the request originated with Fowler. *Id.*

It is also clear that Sullivan was correct when he described as a “false sense” his ultimate reliance upon the Secret Service to catch the unsavory individuals who fell through the cracks in the White House’s porous vetting system. As an initial matter, even the limited vetting conducted by the Secret Service occurs only with respect to events held in the White House. Hancox testified that with respect to events attended by the President that were held outside of the White House, she would not even provide attendee lists to the Secret Service.<sup>16</sup> In those instances, Sullivan’s unreliable inspection of the guest list for the inclusion of foreign nationals served as the exclusive screen.<sup>17</sup>

Colleen Callahan, the Special Agent in Charge of the Secret Service’s White House Division, also stated in an affidavit submitted to the Committee that the Secret Service plays no role in determining the “suitability” of individuals for White House admittance.<sup>18</sup> Instead, the Secret Service, which is responsible for the “physical security of the White House Complex and Secret Service protectees within,”<sup>19</sup> seeks only to uncover “pertinent” criminal history of individuals invited into the White House through a search for each invitee’s name in a database maintained by the National Crime Information Center.<sup>20</sup> A criminal history does not necessarily disqualify an individual from White House admittance. Only if the information uncovered by the

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<sup>16</sup> Deposition of Karen Hancox, June 10, 1997, pp. 9-10.

<sup>17</sup> *See id.*

<sup>18</sup> Affidavit of Colleen B. Callahan, Sept. 9, 1997, p. 1 (Ex. 5).

<sup>19</sup> *See id.*

<sup>20</sup> *See id.* at p. 3.

database search “suggest[s] that the prospective visitor may be violent, dangerous or otherwise pose a physical or security threat to a protectee or the White House Complex” will the Secret Service limit or deny White House access.<sup>21</sup> In other words, although the presence in the White House of a nonviolent, unthreatening criminal is certainly inappropriate, this is not the type of individual that the Secret Service would exclude.

### **The Lack of Proper Vetting Permitted a Series of Unsavory Individuals Access to the President**

As a result of the White House’s admitted failure to properly vet its guest lists, several unsavory individuals were allowed to enter the White House and to attend events with President Clinton. The President’s meetings with Ted Sioeng, Yogesh Ghandi, Roger Tamraz, and a delegation of Chinese businessmen led by Johnny Chung are described in detail in other sections of this report.<sup>22</sup> The following is a summary of additional unsavory individuals whose White House visits were permitted to proceed unimpeded.

◆ Jorge Cabrera

In November 1995, Jorge Cabrera, a Cuban-born U.S. citizen, made a \$20,000 contribution to the DNC and attended a fundraising dinner in honor of Vice President Gore in Miami.<sup>23</sup> One month later, Cabrera attended a Christmas party at the White House and had has

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<sup>21</sup> See *id.* at pp. 3-4.

<sup>22</sup> See the sections of this report on Ted Sioeng, Yogesh Ghandi, Roger Tamraz, and Johnny Chung.

<sup>23</sup> See Don Van Natta, Jr., “An R.S.V.P. to the President: Deep Regrets. I’m in Custody.” *New York Times*, March 22, 1997, p. A1.

picture taken with the First Lady.<sup>24</sup> At the time of Cabrera's White House visit, he had already been convicted of two felonies and had served almost five years in prison. Cabrera pled guilty in 1983 of obstruction of justice for conspiring to bribe a grand jury witness and again in 1988 for filing a false income tax return.<sup>25</sup> Both charges stemmed from arrests on drug charges.<sup>26</sup> In January 1996, Cabrera was arrested and charged with importing 6,000 pounds of cocaine into the United States.<sup>27</sup> He is presently serving a 19-year prison term.<sup>28</sup>

◆ Wang Jun

On February 6, 1996, Charlie Trie escorted a group of individuals including Wang Jun to a White House coffee with President Clinton.<sup>29</sup> Wang Jun's attendance at the coffee was arranged primarily by Ernest Green, managing director of the Washington, D.C. office of Lehman Brothers and a prominent DNC fundraiser.<sup>30</sup> Wang Jun is chairman of the China International Trust and

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<sup>24</sup> *See id.*

<sup>25</sup> *See* Anne Farris, "Secret Service Didn't Tell White House of Guest's Criminal Background," *Washington Post*, Oct. 26, 1996, p. A14.

<sup>26</sup> *See id.*

<sup>27</sup> *See* Stanley Meisler, "Democrats Return Drug Smuggler's Check," *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 20, 1996, p. A25.

<sup>28</sup> *See id.*

<sup>29</sup> *See* guest list for February 6, 1996 coffee with the President attached to "Coffee with Supporters of the Democratic National Committee," Feb. 5, 1996, p. 2 (Ex. 6).

<sup>30</sup> Although Green emphatically denied any role in Wang Jun's attendance at the February 6 coffee, *see* Deposition of Ernest Green, June 18, 1997, pp. 269-70 ("I was not involved in Wang Jun and coffees at the White House at all . . . I was not involved at all in Wang Jun and coffees."), the copy of Wang Jun's resume produced to the Committee by the DNC indicates that its was transmitted to the DNC from a Lehman Brothers' fax machine.

Investment Corporation (“CITIC”), a financial and industrial conglomerate reportedly controlled by the Chinese government.<sup>31</sup> He is also the chairman of Poly Technologies, a company that handles most of Communist China’s arms exports.<sup>32</sup> In 1996, Wang Jun and other officials of Poly Technologies were implicated in a scheme to smuggle thousands of Chinese-made machine guns and assault rifles to criminal elements in the United States.<sup>33</sup>

◆ Eric Wynn

Eric Wynn attended a December 21, 1995 coffee at the White House with President Clinton.<sup>34</sup> At that time, Wynn was free on bond pending appeal of his July 21, 1995 conviction on thirteen counts of conspiracy, securities fraud and wire fraud.<sup>35</sup> Wynn attended four additional fundraisers with President Clinton in 1996, despite being arrested several additional times for

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Resume of Wang Jun (Ex. 7). Sullivan also testified that the DNC added Wang Jun to the guest list for the coffee as a favor to Green. Testimony of Richard L. Sullivan, July 9, 1997, p. 124. Finally, although Green did not attend the February 6 coffee, the DNC attributed Green’s \$50,000 contribution on February 6, 1996 to the White House coffee held on that day. See “DNC Finance Executive Summary,” Oct. 17, 1996 (Ex. 8).

<sup>31</sup> See Steven Mufson, “Chinese Firm Details Visit to White House; Arkansan is Cited as Intermediary,” *Washington Post*, March 18, 1997, p. A4.

<sup>32</sup> See *id.*

<sup>33</sup> See Howard Blum, “The Trail of the Dargon,” *Vanity Fair*, December 1997, pp. 226-44 (discussing the discovery of a Chinese arms smuggling ring by U.S. Treasury agents).

<sup>34</sup> See Bob Woodward & Charles R. Babcock, “Stock Manipulator Attended Coffee with Clinton,” *Washington Post*, Feb. 1, 1997, p. A1.

<sup>35</sup> See *id.*

offenses such as assaulting a police officer, resisting arrest, aggravated assault with a motor vehicle and driving while intoxicated.<sup>36</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Whether by gross negligence or conscious design for fundraising purposes, the process in place at the White House for the vetting of individuals granted access to the President was incapable of keeping unthreatening criminals, inappropriate foreign citizens and other disreputable characters out of the White House and away from the President. No White House employees were specifically charged with evaluating guest lists submitted by the DNC for the sorts of unsavory individuals who, in fact, later appeared at White House coffees and other events with the President and Vice President. Instead, the White House left the responsibility with the DNC, which took inappropriate comfort in the background checks performed by the Secret Service, and therefore only haphazardly reviewed its lists for the appearance of foreign nationals. As the Secret Service sought to weed out only those criminals who posed a physical threat to the White House or the Secret Service's "protectees," convicted criminals that the Secret Service deemed to be nonviolent or unthreatening were permitted to pass the White House gate without comment. This was a system designed to fail, and it operated precisely as designed.

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<sup>36</sup> See Bob Woodward, "Felon Also Attended 4 DNC Events with Clinton," *Washington Post*, Feb. 20, 1997, p. A4.