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January 22, 2009

The Honorable Diane Feinstein
Chair, Joint Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Feinstein:

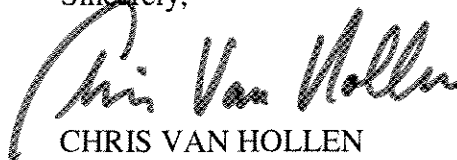
I am writing to express my deep concern over the fact that thousands of people who had tickets were denied access to the historic swearing-in ceremony for President Barack Obama, and applaud you for initiating a thorough investigation into how this happened. I strongly endorse this review and look forward to learning what went wrong so we can avoid such problems in the future.

My office has received many calls and emails from constituents expressing their disappointment and heartbreak over not being able to witness this momentous occasion. And to be clear, these are individuals who did everything they were supposed to do. They obtained tickets issued by the Joint Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies; they arrived at the entrance gates early in the morning; and they waited for hours to go through security. Yet despite following the rules, they were still denied access. And worse yet, they were kept in the dark – deprived of information – as the hours passed and their hopes of seeing history in the making slipped away. As one of my constituent put it, “I waited more than 50 years for this moment, and now I’ve missed it.”

I understand and appreciate the enormous security challenges presented by the nearly 2 million people who took part in this inaugural event, and I salute the extraordinary planning that went into this effort. However, I am baffled by the break down, on such a broad scale, of the processing of people who followed the rules and came only to see, hear and be part of this remarkable moment in our nation’s history.

I look forward to reviewing the findings of the investigation so we can ensure accountability and prevent such breakdowns in the future.

Sincerely,



CHRIS VAN HOLLEN
Member of Congress