

An Interview with Former Chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Mike Rogers

Interviewed by Peter Usowski and Fran Moore

Editor's note: Congressman Mike Rogers (R-MI) served in the House of Representatives from 2001 to 2015. From 2011 to 2015, he was chairman of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI). The interview took place in Washington, DC, on 24 July 2018.

Getting up to speed in the work of HPSCI

I came to the chairmanship with background as a former FBI guy and Army officer. I just brought a different perspective. [Before becoming chairman], I had served on the committee for about six years. At the beginning, I just decided I was going to learn about all the things I didn't know about coming into the committee. I spent a large amount of time going out talking to people who do specific work, both in the civilian and military side, just to make sure I had a good understanding. I did a lot of CODELS [congressional delegations] on my own or with one other member to get to places a little off the beaten path so I could have an understanding of what was happening in the collection posture of the US intelligence services. And I read just about everything that came through. I'm a ferocious reader anyway, and I thought it was my responsibility to try to read as much of that material as I could get through. And I think that helped me a lot.

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Congressman Rogers, facing the camera, in conversation on 9 January 2014 with President Obama and Senator Saxby Chambliss, chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, in the White House Roosevelt Room after a meeting concerning intelligence programs. Photo © White House/Alamy Stock Photo

Primary issues: Counterterrorism, Counterintelligence, Appropriations

Clearly, the terrorism/counterterrorism issue was pretty significant at that time. I spent a lot of time on those issues, including advocating for changes in certain programs within the CIA. I felt that certain programs were not being utilized to their full potential. One example involved our kinetic strike capability. There was a lot of talk about it within the White House, and I felt I could play a role in that discussion. I had gone forward a lot, and I understood the issue from the bottom up and believed it could make an impact.

I also brought back, in a more robust way, our counterintelligence oversight, which hadn't really been there. It had drifted away.

I felt very strongly that no oversight committee can be a real oversight committee if [HPSCI] doesn't do a budget [i.e., pass an authorization bill].

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I focused a lot on that, and I worked very closely with my Democrat counterpart, Dutch Ruppersberger (MD). We decided to run it as partners versus parties, and I think it had a significant advantage in getting through some thorny issues and recapture the committee's responsibility for oversight.^a

Every year we were there, we did an intelligence authorization bill, which hadn't been done for six years before our arrival. I felt it was very important to get back into the regular order of oversight. We also brought back—at the time a little fortuitously—an effort to make sure we had a good understanding of where the Russians were at the time—that's my old FBI background. You know I grew up shooting at Soviet targets when I was in the Army; some things you can't shake. And so I had a personal interest in trying to understand where they were. I'm pretty confident the Russian intelligence services didn't walk away from their efforts. I wanted to have a better understanding. I thought it was important for the committee to have a better understanding, and because

we were doing budgets, asset allocation became very, very important. We reinvigorated our counterintelligence oversight, we invigorated our Russian discussions, we spent a lot of time on the Iran issue, we worked on budget oversight, and spent a lot of time on some thorny issues on the counterterrorism side.

DNI, CIA Responses to a New Chairman: "Healthy Tension"

In the beginning, like anything, "Why are you here?" and "Leave us alone." And I understand that. I think a healthy tension is probably a good thing. But over time, I think the community came to trust that I wasn't there to run to the microphone, to cause trouble looking for a problem. I was there to say, "Hey, we have these resources, how do we apply these resources? Are there policy things we can help you with?" Because in my mind, as a member of Congress on the Intelligence Committee, it was my responsibility as much as anyone's to make sure America is protected. And we were going to put demands on the Intelligence Community to do that. And if I'm going to put those demands on the Intelligence Community, I wanted to make sure

it had the right resources, the right policy, and, candidly, the right moral support for doing a very difficult mission.

That's the way I took it. Now, at least I would hope, other directors might tell you that if we found something that wasn't working—and there was an honest disagreement—I was never afraid of applying, as Keith Alexander called it, "the Rogers wire-brush treatment." Only in the sense that I thought I was following our responsibility. It was never to try to embarrass anyone or do anything like that. I think over time we developed a great relationship, and it got to where I wanted it to be.

My goal, as chairman, was to never issue a subpoena, which I had the power to do. And I said that upfront to the community. That was my goal. And luckily, we never had to use a subpoena, because we built up trust. If I asked, I got it. If they had something go wrong, they wouldn't wait, they'd come up and talk to me about it. And to me, that's the way you should do oversight. You don't run to the *Washington Post*, you don't run to phone in and say, "My gosh, I caught the intelligence agency doing X." And by the way, I say "me" a lot, but Dutch Ruppersberger was right there with me. And that was really

a. The following appeared on Mr. C.A. Dutch Ruppersberger's website (<https://ruppersberger.house.gov/about-dutch/full-biography>) (accessed 17 November 2018):

"The assignment comes after a committee-record 12 years serving on the House Intelligence Committee, including four as Ranking Member. Congressman Ruppersberger was the first Democratic freshman ever appointed to the committee, which oversees the collection and analysis of intelligence from around the world to ensure our national security and prevent potential crisis situations — especially terrorist activity. He traveled to more than 50 countries including Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, China and Venezuela during his time on the committee."

"On the committee, he developed a reputation for bipartisan leadership with then-Chairman and Republican Mike Rogers. Beginning in 2011, the pair worked together to pass five intelligence authorization bills over four years -- after a 6-year period without one—as well as bipartisan cybersecurity legislation. In 2015, they became the first dual recipients of the prestigious William Oliver Baker Award from the nonpartisan Intelligence and National Security Alliance for their pragmatic leadership."

critically important, to have someone who equally believed that we should put the needs of national security before our partisanship. I really can't stress that enough.

I think I would describe my relationships with each [DNI and DCIA] as very strong, with all of them. They all had their different styles. They all had different attitudes about what oversight meant to them, and I think we worked through all of that. I think Leon Panetta (DCIA, 2009–2011) and I had a phenomenal relationship as far as him understanding where I was coming from and understanding what I needed to do my job, and vice versa. I would put him at the top of that list. And with the other ones, we worked through it. David Petraeus had his way of doing things, and John Brennan had his way of doing things. Some were more guarded than others, and of course if you add a tension to the relationship, I'm certainly no wall flower. I'm happy to step up and make corrections and "attitude adjustments," as my father used to say. But we didn't really get into a lot of that. It was just more of "Yep, you know what I'm doing, I know what you're doing, let's get at it. If we disagree I'm going to be very honest and frank with you and I expect you to be honest and frank with me as well."

View of the DNI/ODNI

I think until Jim Clapper got there, the ODNI (Office of the Director of National Intelligence) was in drift. I think because Jim Clapper had so much experience in the community, he didn't go there to make his mark on operations. He'd been there and done that. I think that helped tremendously. He started focusing in a

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way I thought the DNI should focus: What are the strategic threats? As the guy putting together the billions of dollars and the 70-plus portions of the budget, Jim Clapper helped guide the organization through that.

In my mind, Jim Clapper remade Mike Rogers' original position on the DNI. Before Jim Clapper, we saw all the infighting and the stealing of people and all the things that guys like me knew, or at least believed, was going to happen. Jim Clapper got there, settled it down, and focused on mission. I do believe that [because of him] the *President's Daily Brief* is a better product. I think they get a more measured, multiagency view of the world, which I think is healthy. It's not perfect. There are things we should change—I always fought about the size of it; I thought it was way too big. But at the end of the day, I think that sums up my thoughts.

Quality of IC Information Exchange and Briefings of HPSCI

I would say the briefing caliber was mostly good, but then there were briefings when I scratched my head and wondered why they showed up. I would say they were on the positive side more often than not. Of the quality of professional we saw, phenomenal. I mean, just phenomenal. One of the things we were trying to do along the way was to try to bring in people from down the totem pole to come in to get experience for them and to hear their perspective on an operation or some [other aspect of intel-

ligence]. I thought that was helpful. Some of those folks just blow you away. Gives you the feeling that you can sleep well at night, knowing the agency will be in great hands in five or six or eight years or whatever their leadership track is. Overall, it was impressive.

Every once in a while, we bumped into something adversarial, but that didn't happen often. And even when it did, I thought [discussion] remained at a professional level because it wasn't antagonistic. I always found if you offered professionalism, you'd get professionalism in return.

Advice to Briefers of HPSCI

Boy, look at the time. You know, the odd thing about the intelligence committee, it is a bit personality driven. It's unavoidable. There is no set of rules that says, "Here are the five things you have to do every day, Mr. Chairman, to get through to the next day and make sure you're preforming your mission." It's completely up to the chairman. And in this case, I didn't do anything without consultation with my ranking member (Dutch Ruppersberger). He was a former prosecutor; I was a former FBI guy. We'd get how all that works, and it worked phenomenally well, and we could finally steer into things we thought were important for the committee. For example, what is our strategic picture of nations other than counterterrorism threat? There were some frustrations along the way about policy changes and things like that. But my advice to briefers is to

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go in and be professional. Present your case, don't let them [members] get under your skin. In that regard, and I hate to say it, but to be candid, it's just not the same today as it was. I do think it's a responsibility [to be professional].

A former employee reminded me of a story, I had almost forgotten it. I was so upset when I thought the Intelligence Community wasn't fully briefing me on every sliver of a project the administration had said not to brief the committee on. I called in unit after unit and read them the law on the IC responsibility to keep Congress fully informed. They knew I was honked off. For me it was a good opportunity to meet units I hadn't seen before. The employee laughed afterward and said, "You know some of the units loved it because they thought nobody knew they existed." I just think if you come up and you're professional and you do your business and don't let what appears to be the politics of the committee influence your presentation, you're going to be fine.

And I completely understand the reluctance of people to come up and participate in the committee process; I hear it a lot. But it's disheartening to me. It's disappointing to me. I think the IC has an obligation to show up. But be professional, give the members the information they need, and then don't say much. And when it's your time to leave, thank them for their time and move on. My argument is that you [intelligence professionals] have long careers. If it's your turn in the barrel, go up to the committee, go up with pride, be professional, give them the informa-

tion they need and require, and then go back to work and let the things happen at the [hearing room] podium that happen at the podium.

Thoughts on Quality of IC Intelligence Analysis?

I think good. I always pushed back to make sure that dissenting views got an airing, even with the committee. There was this natural fear that analysis could be skewed one way or another—I don't mean this to sound like we believed every piece of analysis was skewed. But I always pushed back. I understand you need to be smart about that these days, but I always thought it was really important to hear some of those dissenting views. I don't think the IC should feel bad about the notion that an analysis was not a slam dunk that there wasn't unanimity in a position.

As policymakers ourselves, I just wanted to know. And if that [analysis is] the IC conclusion, I get it; really smart people helped make that decision, but there might be someone in the chain that thought something different. It's okay to put that in there. It doesn't mean that would change our decision any more than it would change the outcome of the analysis. In that respect, I think you have to treat members with the same kind of professionalism you do amongst yourselves. Like, yeah, we had four people disagree, whatever the number is, and 20 people said, this, and three people said that. That's just the way it goes. Got it.

And so, I do think, the analytical product, to me, was very good. If I ever had a problem, I could bring

people in and walk them through how they got there; I thought that was great, and my only pet peeve, if you will, is when they were reluctant to share the dissenting opinions. Other than that, I thought it was exceptionally good.

Most Controversial Issues?

Snowden happened on my watch. I somehow got the ticket to go to Brussels and try to explain things to the EU Commission. There's about three months of my life I would like back. That was obviously thorny, and it brought programs that I had supported in classified settings out into the open, and I had to work my way through that to try to have a public dialog and make sure we weren't disclosing things. That was a challenging time, no doubt about it. And candidly, we lost the public narrative on that before we got started. And I'm not sure we've gotten it put back in the can yet, about what the real facts were versus what people think happened, including our EU Commission friends. That was a big thorny one.

Iran issues were pretty thorny. Lots of consternation.

And I would argue the kinetic strike program also. And, as I was a proponent of it, I still, candidly to this day, believe it is one of the most effective, impactful things we have done to dismantle and disrupt terrorists operations around the world.

Oversight of Kinetic Strikes

I was a proponent of the program and took extraordinary steps to try to get it in a good place, including meeting with President Bush and

secondly the Obama administration. I reviewed every single strike—I doubt anyone else had done this. I did all the after-action reviews; on very sensitive targets, they would brief me ahead of time, “Hey our target’s in the window,” or not. You know that didn’t always work, but if I was available and had the wherewithal to get that information in a classified setting, I did, and I reviewed every single one because I was such a vocal proponent publicly for the program and I believed it was my job as a member and chairman to make sure that, if we’re going to do this—this is a big deal, you’re taking someone’s life—so if something did go wrong, I could honestly and in good faith go and defend the program, the people in the program, and why we were doing it versus saying, “Oh my gosh, this is awful.” And I saw that happen too many times.

Quality of Relationships with the White House

Excellent under George W. Bush, not so good under Obama, and I don’t mean that in a bad way. I mean, I had people I could reach out and talk to, but the circle of people they [the Obama administration] included in those discussions got very, very small. And they were very distrustful of anyone outside of their small circle. I continued to work with them, where I could, supported them on as much as I could, told them where I differed with them, and I never ran out to the microphone and said, “They’re doing X and America’s coming to an end!” I just didn’t believe that. Where we had a fight, we had a fight. When the door’s open, the door’s open, that’s it. And so, I would say it was a mixed bag under

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the Obama administration. Again, I think they looked at everything happening really in a distrustful way, even though I was helping them on some fairly major issues.

Another example, the Syrian issue, I coordinated, at significant political capital to myself, which again is not why I was chairman, I didn’t care about that. [My goal was] to bring people in from the administration, the Obama administration, [to talk] about where we were, and what kinds of things we were trying to do, and try to put the votes together to approve certain programs. And there wasn’t a lot of me around. And these kinds of things afterward, if they go well or don’t go well. If they don’t go well, funny, apparently I was the only guy for it. And so, in that regard, it was okay, it just was such a mixed bag, and that’s one thing I regretted.

I extended opportunities to come up and talk all the time; I gave them whatever information they needed. As I said, if I supported it, I supported it. I didn’t care whose party it was. And so, again, I think that’s just the way of a personality-driven White House. Just talking to people now, I think this new administration is equally isolated and segmented, and I think that’s not healthy. I hope this is not something that goes off into the future, because then you’ll have more contention. And I don’t care who the president is, you shouldn’t be there [in the HPSCI] to use those issues for political purposes.

Interactions with House leadership, with the House Appropriations Committee, and with SSCI (Senate Select Committee on Intelligence)

I’ll start with the last one. I got along very well with Chairman Diane Feinstein (D-CA); we also had a great understanding and working relationship. Saxby Chambliss was the Republican (GA) ranking member; I got along fine, and we worked out our issues. One of the reasons we got our budgets passed is because we forged that relationship. I spent time over there, I went to see them, I talked to them often. Which you would think would happen a lot in Congress; it doesn’t apparently. And so, we worked out a very strong relationship. We didn’t always agree, but we could agree on the budget authorization piece, which would allow us both to go back and do the oversight that we felt was appropriate: the Senate for their issues, and the House for our issues. I thought that was good.

And the reason it worked, again, was personality—you have to work at it. You have to work at it. I used to joke with Diane Feinstein that we’re like an old married couple. We can’t talk about domestic politics, we’d be in an argument; but we can forge this relationship on national security. And I thought it was funny. So did she. I think she had a good sense of humor. And so we just worked it out. We just said, “Hey, this is not about whatever, your water issue in California, this is about national security. We’re going to work here, at that level of national

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security issues, and if we disagree on domestic issues, we'll go to the microphones and fight it out." And we had that kind of an understanding. Which I think is good and healthy, and I think it worked for both committees to their advantage.

With respect to the Appropriations Committee, the key to this is passing an authorization. I like to believe that we pulled a lot of that. What happens is, because these are so classified—more than your readers may want to know—what happens is that when they don't do these budgets, when they [oversight committees] are not paying attention to these budgets, all of that authority and oversight drifts back over to the appropriators. And there's a small number of people—and very few members have the ability, even on appropriations—to see what those programs are. A small number of staff folks get a lot of power, and I just don't think that's healthy. I was adamantly opposed to allowing that to continue. That's one of the big, important reasons I stated from the first that getting an authorization is key to proper oversight. I have beat on my other members, "If you're not reauthorizing your committee or going through this process, you're not a real chairman."

Yeah, it's hard; it's painful. Some days are really dry. I mean, we were going over numbers on fuel consumption for operations. Fuel consumption. Right? And you're thinking, this is pretty rough. When you're talking about 9,000 gallons of helicopter fuel, or some crazy thing, I just felt it was really important to do that. And

when we did that, we wrestled back the authority from the Appropriations Committee, where I argued members on the intel committee can understand, get the programs, understand what the risks are. Whereas these folks on the Appropriations Committee didn't get all that. Nor would they spend a lot of time on it, because in their world, it's not very big. Right? You think about it, it's just not that important. Well, we tried to wrestle that back. And I think we did a great job with that.

As to my relationship with House leadership, John Boehner appointed me and let me do my thing. He was great to work with in that regard.

The Majority and Minority Relationship

The first thing Dutch Ruppberger and I did was to sit down [and talk]. We had watched the dysfunction of certain aspects of the committee. The reason those authorization bills got stalled was because people were throwing political amendments on the bills. If their big public debate was torture, then some political amendment on torture. Or, on the war, some political amendment got on the war. I pledged to him and he pledged to me in this meeting, that we were going to strip out any political amendment. I would not accept it as chairman if he didn't accept it as ranking member, and we would clean the bill of all of the problems that had been the reasons those bills never went anywhere. You take a few arrows from your own team when that happens.

Secondly, we also said with every budget, we're going to go through these budget briefs, and it's going to be painful. We're going to spend hours doing this. And, of course, the first one was always the worst because people didn't understand why we were in there for hours talking about budgets. Right? It's not exciting. Important, but not exciting. We directed that the staffs were going to brief together, at the same table. That was shock and awe. What? We can't do that. You have a Republican staff and a Democrat staff, and half of them don't like each other at that time, and I argued it was probably because they don't know each other very well, and it's "You're my enemy so we're going to fight about stupid things." We both enforced the staffs briefing together, which was really important.

That fundamentally changed the way the committee operated. I would take briefings from Democrat staff all the time: "Come and tell me what you think." We just started tearing down this notion that you're a Democrat and I'm Republican, and, again, we understood there would be things we disagreed with. That's great, but we came together to talk about it versus screaming at each at a committee hearing. Throwing paper at each other. That, I think, went a long way. And we worked with members who had issues about Program A, B, or C or D, and if they had personal issues about it, I tried to accommodate them—and the same with Dutch. Dutch would help accommodate it so that if I had a minority member who said, "Hey, I don't like X," I'd say, "How can I help you? If you want, I'll bring the director in. You tell me what you need to understand, and I'll get you anywhere in the world you

have to go if you think you need to do that.” And that proved to be very helpful. Nothing was antagonistic, no question was out of bounds.

I also thought I put together a better reading packet, and I made it available to members, “Come in, read through these packets, it’ll help you prepare if you don’t have tons of time for a hearing.” That was my other thing, “Please don’t come unprepared. When we’re asking these working intelligence officials for two hours or three hours of time, be prepared. Don’t ask a dumb question.” We forced people to prepare themselves. In the beginning, I had staff available the day before hearings and said, “Come down, and if you have a question, that’s where you ask your dumb question.” And it’s not dumb if you’re learning, clearly, but I don’t want you to do it in front of them. Just like you all practice before you got to us, I wanted us to practice before you all got to us as well. I think that was pretty helpful. Not every member took advantage; some members were more interested in it than others. But I do think it improved the level of the members’ smarts about tough issues and their questions. And I think all of that just helped to make a better committee. And again, we tried to take both Democrat and Republican staff in those pre-briefs, answering questions, offering help. It was “What do you need to know, can we help you? Can you phrase your question like this; it might be more beneficial to get what you need. Perfect.” Seemed to work.

If [staffers] came because they had experience and wanted to put that experience to work in the broader context of the Intelligence Community, great.

What Makes for a Good HPSCI staffer?

If you’re a person who comes there because you were frustrated with the Intelligence Community, bad idea. You’re going to hate that staffer very quickly. If they came because they had experience and wanted to put that experience to work in the broader context of the Intelligence Community, great. And they all come with passions, and understanding, and expertise. We tried to assemble people by that. I think we got it pretty right. And the other thing for me on my committee, you either had to buy into the program we were selling, or no thank you. You want to come there to be a partisan fighter? Don’t come to the Intelligence Committee; I just didn’t want you there. You just weren’t going to help. And we had some people come and go, and some people didn’t like that, and good on them, maybe there’s a better place for you in Congress somewhere else.

I wanted staffers who, even if they didn’t have tons of experience in the business, were academically qualified to come up and help us on certain things. They can learn a little, the Intelligence Committee can learn from you, and we can all put a better product together. I tried to have that *mix* of people. And I ended up having a lot of people who had experience doing something at some point in their careers: some from the CIA, some from the military side, I had a *mix* of everybody. And it balanced. And I had some folks from the former NSC. The former chairman, Michael Allen, was the NSC guy and brought that

flavor to it. And to me, that makes the stew taste a little better.

Perspectives on Media

Relationship with the media. I had a different attitude on this than other chairmen, I admit it. Because of the level of controversy coming out of the committee at that time, I felt it was very important to go out and at least have a dialogue with the media. I was trying to take some of the mystery away—where they didn’t sit in the bar and on their third beer decide that every CIA officer is trying to steal their rights or whatever. I worried about that, because that was the only narrative out there. I took a pretty aggressive stance about trying to interact with the media and tried to explain—never compromising methods and sources—that we make policy decisions and why we were making them. And why that was important. And I do believe that helped when bad things happened. The media trusted me. It didn’t like everything I said, but they trusted me, knowing I wasn’t going to lie to them. I was honest about it.

Most of my chairmanship was with Obama. If I agreed with him, I said I agreed with him. If I didn’t agree with him, I said, “Here’s why I don’t agree with him.” But I didn’t use the classified portion of that to justify my argument. And so I think that was an important role. Some people have a hard time with that. I used to tell all my members, “If you’re not used to dealing with classified information, don’t talk to the press. If they come to you, take a year. Take 12 months or 18 months

Notwithstanding [some poor reporting], there are good, thorough, honest journalists. I think of the big, high profile guys: David Ignatius, always tried to get it right; the AP reporter, injured in Iraq, Kim Dozur; you know people like that. I always thought they were trying to get it right.

to learn the material. Learn what a classification is, because you can make a mistake that gets people hurt, and so you've got to be really careful about it." You know I had been on the committee a while, I understood how to handle classified materials. By the time I was chairman, I think I was fairly well prepared to deal with the nuance of what you can talk about, what you can't, and what you should be talking about when it comes to intelligence. And I told myself, "I get to see really positive, good things a lot, and they deserve a little defending in the public record, at least [they should get as much attention] as the folks who had done something wrong."

Media coverage of the intelligence business? It was in frustration, honestly, that I took a more public role in trying to defend the IC. I don't know if that's the right terminology, but at least try to get the media to acknowledge there's a whole other side that you don't get to see, and when things go well, it's like the firefighters, you know? If they never leave the firehouse, you start thinking that they're awful people. But guess what, when your house is on fire, you're pretty damn glad they're there. I think a lot of media coverage is highly skeptical of the community. I think, in so many ways, the media think the community is just as eager to break the law as it is to follow the law. That was the one that used to get me the most because

they did not understand the ethos and ethics and commitment to follow the law of 99.9 percent of the people in the Intelligence Community have.

I'll never forget this. When there was the big disclosure on the telecommunication companies doing metadata, the reason we got behind on the narrative is that it wasn't anyone involved in the program, even the contractors. It was a contractor about three rings out who thought something bad was happening in the little black room that they wouldn't let him in. And so the media got spun up on that, and so they were convinced that everyone was lying before they opened their mouths. That was really, really frustrating to me, because the media had a great story. They had it wrong, but it was a great story. Oh, my gosh, they're spying on you. The NSA is listening to every phone call and reading every email. No, that's not the way it works.

Notwithstanding, there are good, thorough, honest journalists. I think of the big, high profile guys: David Ignatius, always tried to get it right; the AP reporter, injured in Iraq, Kim Dozier; you know people like that. I always thought they were trying to get it right. Ken Dilanian was pretty good, from the *LA Times*; he's a national security guy; he was trying to get it right. They don't always get it right, because of the information they get. And I worry about the reporters

who only want to break the scoop about something bad happening, get their prize, their Pulitzer Prize. And so they're very aggressive.

IC interactions with the press. I always said, when I'm all done with all of this, I want to be the press person for the Intelligence Community. It may be the easiest job ever: "No comment." "Call me back tomorrow, I'll have another statement for you. No comment." I do think they've tried to get a little better. I never found it good that they were doing off-the-record briefings for reporters. I'll tell you why. As chairman I used to go nuts when I found out they did it, because we have members who weren't getting those kinds of briefings. And I'm like: "You can't do that. You cannot do that!"

I do think the community needs to have a better public-facing arm of what they do, but that was not the way to do it. It still irks me to this day, because then I'd have members honked off, that somebody's leaking to the press. Well, no not really, it was a briefing from the community. "Well, how come I couldn't get that information?" I just thought it worked against the community's or agency's purpose.

I do think they need to find ways to be more transparent. They don't have to give a lot. One of the reasons I really wanted to do the show "Declassified" was because I wanted to show positive stories.^a I mean Charlotte was hard. It didn't always work out the way we thought it would work out, but at the end of the day, it gave a positive spin on work in

a. *Declassified: Untold Stories of American Spies* is a documentary series that details cases, missions and operations of the American intelligence community. It has appeared since 2016 on CNN.

the Intelligence Community. I know that sounds corny. Honest, I had no other reason to do that. I was frustrated that we couldn't get those stories out, and I wish they could do better, but I understand why sometimes they don't have the option to.

Addressing Whistleblower Incidents.

I took such incidents very seriously. I had a legal counsel or a special investigator in the committee assigned to review cases. Most of them had legal backgrounds. I don't care if it sounded crazy, when the first phone call [from a whistleblower] came in, I took it seriously. If that [whistleblower] system is going to be a safety valve for people feeling like something bad is happening, we needed to take it deadly seriously—much to the chagrin sometimes of the community, which says “Really? That's the craziest thing I've ever heard in my life.” Sorry, we're going to go through this process. Let us determine if it is the craziest thing in the world. Again, I did that because I felt the [people in] the community absolutely needed to be able to pick up a phone and call us. I know every agency in the community has one [an inspector general or ombudsman?]. We were just another [safety valve] outside of that. Plus, we have access to the material.

But I also treated it seriously in the sense that I respected the agents; I went into this with the idea of due process, as in an investigation. I mean, I'm not going to walk in and say, “Why did you kill John F. Kennedy? One of your employees told me that.” We went in and said, “Hey, there is this set of facts we're operating on; we're going to need to

I know having members come out to places with clandestine operations is a pain in the ass, but to me they are great opportunities to show members the difficulties of what happens and what you actually do.

investigate this; we're going to need a little information.” I never had a problem, honestly, all of that time, people handled it very professionally—as we did. Now, sometimes they're not happy with our outcome, and they call someone else, that's fine, too. But you have to have a functioning place for these people to call, or they're calling the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times* and not getting the story right.

Evolution of Perspectives on Oversight, on the IC

On oversight itself, my perspectives haven't changed, not really. I had a few years in the beginning, when [the committee] just wasn't functioning very well, and it was disappointing to me. I remember one particular occasion, when the ranking member and a member, or the chairman, were basically screaming at each other in front of our panel of witnesses. To the point where they both got up and left the room. And the rest of us were sitting in our chairs waiting, in the classified setting, for the hearing to start. I was mortified that we would have that fight in a back room somewhere. In a way I appreciated that happening, because it really cemented my notion, “Boy, if I ever had the opportunity to influence this place, we are not doing that. And we are going to conduct ourselves in a way that I think both the Intelligence Community and we would say was professional.” And I think we accomplished that.

I think [for me] it was just constant growing. I know having

members come out to places with clandestine operations is a pain in the ass, but to me they are great opportunities to show members the difficulties of what happens and what you actually do. Hey, there are no Aston Martins and no martinis, and I think the tuxedos may have been stolen. You know, it gives members an opportunity to see that kind of work up close and personal, and I think that helps inform and take the edge off of members. Everywhere I went, I always encouraged [intelligence officers] to listen if a member shows up. It's the officers' opportunity to be proud of what they're doing. And don't be bashful about telling them, if they ask, where there are issues. My response? “Fine, I can see it's hard, so how can we be helpful?”

In sum, I think that's the only way I changed. [The near brawl] just made me more confident in the fact that I was going to run the committee in a very different way than I had seen before.

Evaluating the Performance of the Committee and Staff

You want me to evaluate the staff of the committee? The committee as a whole? Well, that's a hard thing. [Your question “Is your baby ugly?”] I thought we had a beautiful baby. I don't know. I think we did pretty well. We hit all of our budget marks, we brought back important oversight programs on a regular basis. We put more normalcy back into the counterintelligence efforts that we were overseeing, and more of the strategic

threats that we hadn't been doing in the past. We were working on some of the problems in DIA at the time—and they had a lot of problems. We were focused on that because we could. I don't know. I hate to give it a letter grade, because it'll sound awful, but if we weren't an A, we were dang close.

Public, Media, and IC Perceptions of Oversight

Well, I hear some things now that are just disheartening. I had someone tell me that their worst day is knowing that they have to go up and brief in front of the committee that day. And on a substantive issue, I'm not even talking about an investigation. That, I tell you, is, to me it's just so disheartening. And I hate to say this, it's well deserved. They've abandoned a lot of the things that we were doing that I thought helped benefit the community. And again, I started out by sitting down with all the directors, all the heads of all the agencies and saying "Listen, I know it can be tough, but you want strong oversight, because if something bad happens, a guy like me is going to know that I've gone through and looked under the rug, and I'm going to be with you. If you screw up, I'm going to be with you. But if I don't know about it, I'm not going to be with you. And so let's get over it." And I think all of that stuff is gone, and that what worries me. [I'm also hearing] the same things I heard when I became chairman: "You should be distrustful, and it's going to be bad."

I remember when I first got in there, I heard from people I knew [in the IC] that [people] were apoplectic; they thought I was going to be Attila the Hun. I hope I dispelled that. But I

get it. I understand why that happens, and so, that's what worries me most, is if people don't see it as a functioning, smart committee assignment, and people want to get on it now because it's cool—like, "I want to know secrets." And that, to me is the worst member to have on that committee.

Proudest (Earth-shaking) Moment(s)

I would say making the HPSCI bipartisan and then using that bipartisanship to actually accomplish real things in the committee. And, I'm fairly proud of all the hard things that we went through and how we worked together. I think, to me, that's the way a committee should work when you are working national security issues. I'm most proud of that.

Here's a true story for you: The very first time we sat down and we worked on this budget—and you know the first one is always the hardest one because everybody's still looking at you like "Really? Are you really *not* putting something in there that I don't know about?" We worked through this issue, and Dutch Ruppertsberger and I are sitting in the little ante room on the side. We finally get it all done, and we had my chief of staff, and his chief of staff—who was great by the way, we are still friends, all of us, still friends to this day—literally we had gotten up to shake hands and said "This is it, this is our budget. Are we ready?" We shook hands, and literally the whole building [began shaking]. It was the day of the earthquake. I'm not kidding. We thought, "Oh my God, what have we done?" Like the whole building is shaking. We ended up going outside, but we still laugh about it to this day. Cause it was that: It was a monumental moment for us,

knowing that hey, we could do this. And again, he put up with party guff, I put up with party guff, but we did it. We got the first one done, and the building shook. We walked outside. We laughed for two weeks after that, thinking, "My God, maybe we did that." I thought it was funny.

Reflections on IC and CIA Workforce and Parting Advice

I was always impressed by their professionalism, commitment to mission, and patriotism—not the flag-waving parade-going kind of patriotism, which I like too, don't get me wrong—the quiet patriotism of mission first and "I will accomplish the mission. This is my task, I will complete my task, and I will do it to the best of my ability, because I believe in what I'm doing and I believe in my country." I mean this is that kind of a quiet strength and patriotism that I found inspiring, candidly.

My advice to them would be to focus on their professionalism: their professional development and their craft. Period. The rest of it will take care of itself. Don't pay too much attention to what's happening in the political sphere; this will come and go. There'll be good years, and there'll be bad years, but the work they will be doing will help protect and secure the United States of America, and the better they do it, the safer we are. And if every one of them focuses on their own personal development we're going to be in great shape. And the Agency will be in great shape. And not every day is going to be a good day. Just accept it. Tomorrow will be a better day. Get up and try again.

