

NINTH UNANSWERED BENGHAZI QUESTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. WOLF) for 5 minutes.

Mr. WOLF. Mr. Speaker, there are only 3 more days until the August recess. Given that no new public hearings are scheduled on Benghazi, it's apparent that the questions I've been asking for the past two weeks—and the American people have been asking for more than 10 months—will not be answered by the 1-year anniversary of the Benghazi attack, if ever.

After a year of investigations in five different committees, we still do not know what happened and no one's been held responsible. The House and the Senate have failed. Is it any wonder that the American people are losing confidence in their government?

This is even more remarkable given that over 2 months ago, senior administration officials admitted to the media that they failed to properly respond to the attack in Benghazi; yet the Congress never pressed the matter further.

In a little-noticed article published on Friday, May 17, CBS News' Sharyl Attkisson reported that:

Obama administration officials who were in key positions on September 11, 2012, acknowledge that a range of mistakes were made the night of the attacks on the U.S. missions in Benghazi.

Attkisson continued:

The list of mea culpas by Obama administration officials involved in the Benghazi response and aftermath include standing down the counterterrorism Foreign Emergency Support Team and failing to convene the Counterterrorism Security Group, among others.

One of the key revelations from anonymous senior administration officials is the admission that it refused to deploy the Foreign Emergency Support Team, FEST. According to the article:

The FEST's own mission statement describes a seasoned team of counterterrorism professionals who can respond "quickly and effectively to terror attacks, providing the fastest assistance possible" including "hostage negotiating expertise" and "time-sensitive information and intelligence." In fact, FEST leader Mark Thompson says Benghazi was precisely the sort of crisis to which his team is trained to respond.

The article continued:

As soon as word of the Benghazi attack reached Washington, FEST members "instinctively started packing," said an official involved in the response. "They were told they were not deploying by Patrick Kennedy's front office. In hindsight, I probably would've pushed the button."

It's particularly notable that administration sources pin the decision not just on the State Department leadership, but also on the White House.

While it was the State Department that's said to have taken FEST off the table, the team is directed by the White House National Security Council.

Speaking of the White House role in directing the response, Attkisson re-

ported that the National Security Council also failed to convene the interagency Counterterrorism Security Group, CSG, that evening.

The article noted:

According to a public military document, it's part of a plan to "synchronize the efforts of all the government agencies that have a role to play in the global war on terrorism." But on September 11, 2012, the Obama administration did not convene this body of terrorism expert advisers.

Given the number of agencies involved in the response, including the State Department, CIA, and Defense Department, it's hard to understand why the NSC's interagency terrorism response group wouldn't be convened.

As Attkisson noted, because the CSG wasn't assembled:

There's evidence that some high-level decision-makers were unaware of all available resources. In October, on a phone call that included then-Deputy National Security Adviser Dennis McDonough, now White House Chief of Staff, NSC spokesman Tommy Vietor initially told CBS News: "I don't know what FEST is. It sounds antiquated."

Who are the anonymous senior administration officials who admitted these mistakes to CBS? Why haven't they testified to Congress about these mistakes? Why wasn't the FEST team deployed immediately?

Last week, General Ham admitted that he believed Ambassador Stevens may have been taken hostage by terrorists. Given the FEST's team terrorism and hostage negotiation expertise, who made the decision not to deploy them? Why didn't the White House convene the CSG that night to coordinate the interagency response to the attack? And if that group wasn't responsible for coordination, who was?

Which agency was leading the response that night? Was the State Department directing the Pentagon not to deploy its planes or response teams, while also not sending the FEST team?

Mr. Speaker, I conclude with an important quote in the CBS article from NSC spokesman Tommy Vietor:

From the moment President Obama was briefed on the Benghazi attack, the response effort was handled by the most senior national security officials in government.

The mistakes these anonymous senior officials admit to mattered. Lives were on the line, and ultimately, lives were lost. The Congress must compel these "most senior national security officials" responsible for the response team that night to testify publicly.

We need a bipartisan select committee. If we do not do it, the Congress and the House will have failed.

MEDICARE ANNIVERSARY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Connecticut (Mr. COURTNEY) for 5 minutes.

Mr. COURTNEY. Mr. Speaker, 48 years ago today, Lyndon Johnson, in Independence, Missouri, signed into law the Medicare program in the presence of former President Harry S. Truman.

It's important when you think about that event, which I would argue transformed our country, to go back in time and remember that seniors in 1965, only half had health insurance of any sort; 30 percent of America's seniors lived in poverty; and life expectancy for America's seniors was age 70. If you fast forward today, 48 years later, we have universal health insurance coverage for all seniors, life expectancy is now age 79, and only 7 percent of seniors live below the poverty line.

The decision by Congress earlier that year—it was April of 1965 when our colleague, Congressman JOHN DINGELL, was sitting in the Speaker's Chair and brought the gavel down when the Medicare law was passed—has, again, paid off huge dividends in terms of transforming America's health care system.

Back then, Medicare only covered doctor visits and hospital visits. Today, it covers a broad range of services for seniors—dialysis, medical equipment, outpatient services, such as prescription drug coverage—and as a result, the health care sector of our country has grown. For many, it has created literally careers and opportunities to pursue a system which, again, has produced great results for the folks who live in our country over age 65 and people on disability.

Today, we have challenges that Medicare faces, but there is good news. The Trustees for Medicare recently issued their annual report, and it showed that the solvency of the Medicare trust fund this year was extended out an additional 2 years to 2026. And beyond that date, Medicare does not go bankrupt to zero. There is a shortfall, in terms of the projections by the Trustees, of roughly about 10 percent—a serious problem, but one that we can manage using smart changes to the system. And the Trustees, in their reports, pointed to the Affordable Care Act, when it was signed into law by President Obama in 2010, as extending by 9 years the solvency of the Medicare system.

For seniors, under the Affordable Care Act, they are now getting more help with prescription drug assistance. They were stranded in the doughnut hole prior to 2010. Now they get over half of the cost of those prescription drugs while they're in the doughnut hole discounted. They are also getting free preventive care services—whether it's colonoscopies, annual checkups, smoking cessation programs. All of those essential services for primary care now carry no out-of-pocket costs because of the Affordable Care Act.

The fact is that those changes have extended the solvency of the Affordable Care Act. We have not cut benefits for seniors. We have not made unwise choices, such as the Ryan budget, which proposed raising the eligibility age for seniors to qualify for Medicare to age 67 and would butcher the program into private health insurance for people under age 55, in other words, turning the clock back to where we