

Rep. Trey Gowdy On Benghazi Hearing Tomorrow: Revelations That Will Be New, Provocative, Instructive

Tuesday, May 7, 2013

HH: On the eve of the Benghazi hearing before the House Oversight and Governmental Reform Committee, I am joined by Congressman Trey Gowdy. I'm sure that happens all the time, Trey, a former prosecutor and one of the go-to guys on the panel tomorrow. Congressman, what do you hope to achieve tomorrow?

TG: A couple of things. Number one, to answer questions in those three tranches, because in some ways, we know no more today than we did on September 12th, so the security beforehand, the siege itself, and then what I'll be focusing on tomorrow is the aftermath. And we know we were lied to. I think I can prove tomorrow that it was an intentional misrepresentation by Susan Rice and others. I think what will be new tomorrow is that that intentional misrepresentation actually impeded our ability to access to crime scene, and therefore, you know, you only have one chance to work a crime scene before it's contaminated. So it wasn't just lying to the American people, as serious as that is. You also adversely impacted our ability to really ever get to the bottom of everything that happened that night. So do that, and do that in not a scripted, but an orchestrated, prepared way, keeping in mind that these three witnesses will not be able to answer every question that our fellow citizens have. But if we don't peak people's interest tomorrow, and prove to them that we're serious, and that this is not a political exhibition, that we are disciplined and prepared, then there will be more hearings to come. So that's why I've spent most of my time not only preparing myself, I get five minutes, but also preparing my colleagues who were not trial attorneys, and weren't former prosecutors.

HH: Yeah, Pat Meehan joins me later, another one of the former prosecutors on the panel.

TG: Great guy.

HH: And I really do put a lot of hope in you guys. One of the things I want to hear from Mr. Hicks, and you tell me whether you think this is a valid inquiry, is whether or not he feels that the President, the Vice President, or the former Secretary of State, former Secretary of Defense, have lied to the American people in statements that they've made. He can't obviously prove that, but his subjective impression would go a long way towards generating interest, because he's the guy who knows most closely, doesn't he, what happened?

TG: He did. He was the highest ranking person in Libya once the ambassador was killed. And of course, he remained there, I can tell you, that he will come closer to being able to speak to the Secretary of State, because that's in his line of command. I can tell you that there are going to be exchanges that he had with the Secretary of State's chief of staff, which are troubling at best.

HH: Wow.

TG: And I can tell you beyond any reasonable doubt that he was devastated by what Susan Rice said. And you know, if Hillary Clinton's defense needs to be, 'I was so out of it and not doing my job that I never talked to a Greg Hicks or anyone else, or Susan Rice, didn't prepare her before she went on the five Sunday talk shows', then that'll just have to be her defense. Don't blame me because I was absent at the switch. I don't think that's going to bode well for her future ambitions. But I know he can say, and will, that Susan Rice's Sunday morning talk show directly contradicted the evidence the president of Libya, Christopher Stevens' dying declaration, and negatively impacted our ability to find out what happened. Now if that's not enough to infuriate our fellow citizens, I don't know how much better we can do.

HH: It will, but he has sat for eight months watching Jay Carney obfuscate, say that's a long time ago. He's watched for eight months as Secretary of State Clinton says what difference does it make? He's watched for eight months as people have said no one got stood down, and we get evidence that people were stood down. I'd like to know did he ever come out of his chair in anger at anyone other than Susan Rice. I know about the Rice stuff, but do you think your colleagues have the discipline to listen closely to what he says and follow...I know you will. You'll listen to the answers. But a lot of congressmen don't do so good when it comes to listening as when it comes to talking.

TG: They're going to have to, because tomorrow, the witness is the star. On cross-examination, the lawyer can be the star. But on direct examination, the witness is the star. And you need to ask a who, what, when, where, how question. You need to listen to the answer as you noted, follow up where appropriately. But there's no substitute

for preparation. It's harder to give a five minute speech than it is to give a five hour speech, because you have to prepare. So I have worked with, now, four of my colleagues whose backgrounds are not in litigation, how to ask these questions in a precise, pithy way that makes the witness the star and not some arm-flailing congressman who wants to be on YouTube.

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HH: In fact, Congressman, in the segment before you appeared, Kelly Ayotte said watch Trey Gowdy, murder prosecutor, he'll know how to go after this tomorrow. She also said, though, that you folks need a House select committee, and it could get stood up in a hurry. What do you think about that?

TG: I agree with her wholeheartedly. She's calling for a select committee?

HH: Yes.

TG: Absolutely. I think first of all, Kelly Ayotte was a much better prosecutor than I could ever dream to be, and so Pat Meehan was a phenomenal litigator. Yeah, we need people, number one, who are skilled in investigating, skilled in questioning, and most importantly, an interest and a willingness to prepare. The Committee gave me depositions before we left last week. I read them. Depositions are no good if they're sitting on your desk at home.

HH: Amen. Amen.

TG: So I, you know, Lindsey has been calling for one on the Senate side, and others. I don't even care if I'm on it. I mean, I've love to be on it, but if you can find somebody better, put them on it. I would love to see Speaker Boehner do it. That's a little higher than my pay grade. He's probably more likely to listen to you than to me. But I'd love to see it.

HH: Well, I can guarantee you a few things. One of them is he isn't going to listen to me. But on Page 11 of that joint special report, Trey Gowdy, that the five committees put together, if you read it enough times, things stand out. These lines appear. "Ambassador Stevens traveled to Benghazi on September 10, 2012, to fill staffing gaps between principal officers in Benghazi, and to allow him to reconnect with local contacts. He also planned to attend the establishment of a new American corner at a local Benghazi school." Now it's September 11th in a war-torn, insecure compound that has been the subject of numerous attacks by violent, local jihadists. He does not take adequate security with him. Mr. Hicks can speak to what he was doing there. Will that come up tomorrow?

TG: Yes, sir, and Hugh, let me tell you this. Suffice it to say there's more to it than what you just read. And yes, it will be dealt with. It's important to know the chronology you just set out. It's important to know whether that chronology was altered, and if so, why. And it's important, I think, to have the background on what he really was doing in Benghazi. And that may implicate one of the three folks you have previously asked me about in the administration.

HH: Now the next thing I wanted, that is pregnant, and I heard it, and one of the things I was just going to say, you've got to listen to when the answer is pregnant. Which of the three do you think it may implicate?

TG: Yeah, it would be the one that is not the current president, but her husband was.

HH: Okay, got it. Now listening to answers so you can zoom back in is not something a lot of congressmen do well. Repetition matters a lot. Do you expect, have you been teaching your colleagues how to ask a question three or four times, and how to make sure that the media gets the underlining of the key answer?

TG: I cannot be held responsibility for what some of my friends in the media do and do not get, despite repeated, I'm still asked by some folks in the media more about Mark Sanford than I am about Benghazi, which I find befuddling. But yes, you have to train people to listen to the answer, but you also have to give them a roadmap. And so I sat at home last weekend and came up with probably an hour's worth of questions. And I sent that to OGR staff, and said give these to whoever you want to give them to.

HH: Yeah.

TG: I don't have to ask any of them. But if I were prosecuting this case, this is where I would go. So there's been more preparation for this hearing, more than Fast & Furious, more than for Kathleen Sebelius, more than any other hearing, staff and Chairman Issa, and Chaffetz and others, have done a remarkably good job. Now I hope and pray that the audience can tell it tomorrow, but there has been a concerted effort to be logical and systematic

in how we approach these different areas or categories.

HH: On Page 15 of the joint report, it says that the lasers that were used were not lasing targets for air assets. People with knowledge of how lasing is used have told me that's absurd. They don't do it for that reason. Are you persuaded that that account in the joint report is correct, that they were not lasing for air targets?

TG: I would be doing you and your listeners a disservice if I tried to answer that question, because I have no idea what the answer is.

HH: All right, then Jake Tapper, this one you will. Jake Tapper began the show today, and he made an appeal. He said look, if you're a whistleblower, or if you know something about this, come to me, come to Bret Baier, come to the media, because the media will add credibility to the investigation that Republicans can't bring to the table. What do you make of that?

TG: That's true. Unfortunately, that's probably true that the media is more widely regarded than House Republicans. I would also give anyone listening to your show that is contemplating that, I would simply tell them this. The family members are going to be there tomorrow. And if you can look at a widow, or a sister who's lost her brother, or parents who have lost children, if you can look them in the eyes and you have information that can give them peace, and more importantly, hold your government accountable, and you say silent when you know that Darrell Issa and others are going to protect you and give you counsel, and make sure you're not retributed against? I don't see how anyone can sit there with knowledge and be quiet when what they have to say can not only bring truth to government, but also bring peace to people who are suffering. So whether they go to the media or whether they come to Darrell, or whether they go to Elijah Cummings, I don't care where they go. If you have first-hand knowledge, you should come forward. It is the moral thing to do.

HH: Now last question, Trey Gowdy, on July 13th, 1973, Alexander Butterfield told Senate investigators that there was a taping system in the White House. He didn't go public with that until his Senate testimony three days later on July 16th. And of course, it shook the United States of America. On the Richter Scale, you've read the depositions, so you know what is already gone to staff, and what may come out tomorrow. On the Richter of Senate and House hearings, where is tomorrow's?

TG: Well, I'll answer that question this way. My fear over the weekend was that a lot of the information that I thought would be most interesting tomorrow has already been released. So I went to staff, and I went to others, and said with any jury trial, you have to save something back. You have to be interesting on the day of the trial. And I have been assured, in fact, I know, because I've seen it myself, there's going to be new, provocative, instructive, dare not use the word explosive, but there's going to be information that comes out tomorrow that whether people have been so desensitized to government lying to them that they don't care anymore, I cannot speak to that. But if you're interested in Benghazi, there is going to be enough new material tomorrow to make you absolutely livid that it's taken eight months for us to get to this point.

HH: Well, I hope when it comes out, you'll come back. Congressman Trey Gowdy, good luck tomorrow in getting the truth. That's what we want.

End of interview.