

Congressman Ron DeSantis On The Benghazi Select Committee

Thursday, May 8, 2014

HH: Tomorrow, the House of Representatives will vote to empanel a special select committee to investigate the attacks in Benghazi that led to the murder of Ambassador Stevens, Sean Smith, Ty Woods and Mr. Doherty, Glen Doherty. Voting on that tomorrow will be Congressman Ron DeSantis. He is a former commissioned officer in the United States Navy. He was a JAG. He is a combat veteran, went to Harvard Law School, did his undergraduate at a little school in New Haven no one's ever heard of playing baseball there. Congressman DeSantis, welcome back, good to have you.

RD: Hey, Hugh, how are you?

HH: I'm terrific. If you're asked to serve on this committee, would you?

RD: Oh, absolutely.

HH: And would you like to?

RD: I would. I think that part of it is I'm on Foreign Affairs and Oversight now, so I've gotten, I've been a part of the investigation in the State Department from the beginning on Foreign Affairs, and then a little bit broader investigation on OGR. And so I would start with a good foundation. Of course, the Intel Committee and Armed Services have done a lot, too. But I think I would start a step ahead from a lot of folks just having lived this for my entire freshman term so far.

HH: I've been pushing for you and Congressman Pompeo, and not because you're both Harvard Law grads, but because you're both military veterans. And much of this story is about what the military did and did not do that night. And there's a lot of jargon. And I mean, I've been covering this as well as I can, and I hang around military people as much as possible, and I read this stuff. But you folks just speak a different language sometimes.

RD: Well, it's true, and this is obviously a critical issue. And my constituents are just like, why wasn't anything done? And so we need to investigate, get all the answers, understand how this would have gone up through the chain of command and get people to be on the record about this. But we also need to understand it's not a video game. I mean, there are very serious issues in terms of if you are deploying any force, even a rescue force. And so, and there's been some controversy even within our committee. I don't know if you saw, but we did, last week on Oversight, we had the deputy J-2 from AFRICOMM after his testimony, which I thought was very effective, the chairman of the Armed Service Committee put out a statement saying hey, well, they've looked at certain things. So I think there's been a disagreement even within our committee about the military response.

HH: Sure.

RD: And so I think it's very important that we get all the facts on that and uncover the truth for the American people.

HH: Now Ron DeSantis, I read earlier today the breaking news story that out of Northern Nigeria, Boko Haram has struck again. This time, they've killed at least 336 people in one town on Monday, massacring people with AK-47's, burning their houses down. This is radical Islam metastasizing on the African continent. And al Qaeda in Libya is just part of a worldwide phenomenon. I don't know how wide a scope of lens the Benghazi select committee will have, but I hope they put the attackers in the context of this radical Islamic movement with his worldwide. Do you think they will?

RD: We should, and you're right. And you remember right before these attacks, Mitt Romney when he was the nominee, he was talking about how terrorists were operating in places like Mali, and the media, they were laughing, oh, who would ever talk about Mali kind of deal? Well, we know certain terrorists are operating way more, under way more territory than they were before 9/11. But certainly within Africa, it's gotten progressively worse. And I think, of course, the motivation for the cover-up of the video and not coming clean about it being an attack was to, I think, shield Hillary Clinton and President Obama from the reality that their policies have actually

allowed there to be more terrorist activity in Africa. And that's just a fact that conflicted with his campaign narrative. But I think by 9/11, 2012, that was becoming increasingly clear. And then since then, I think the evidence is incontrovertible.

HH: Now here is former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton earlier today. She was asked whether or not enough has been done on Benghazi already, and here is her response to ABC's Robin Roberts.

HRC: Absolutely. I mean, of course there are a lot of reasons why despite all of the hearings, all of the information that's been provided, some choose not to be satisfied and choose to continue to move forward. That's their choice, and I do not believe there is any reason for it to continue in this way, but they get to call the shots in the Congress.

HH: So Congressman Ron DeSantis, the former Secretary of State is saying there is no reason for the select committee, that absolutely all the investigation that needs to be done has been done. How do you respond to that?

RD: Well then, she should tell us why were the security arrangements for Ambassador Stevens denied? She should tell us why he was in Benghazi, given the situation. Why were we, we had an American presence in Benghazi. We were the last flag flying. She could tell us what she did in these critical hours. She could tell us why she put out a press release at the State Department the night of these attacks talking about the video. She could talk about where the President was, what conversations she's had with him. So there are a lot of unanswered questions. You know, she did testify before the Foreign Affairs Committee, and I think the difference with the select committee is it's not going to be just five minutes where she can filibuster. You'd actually be able to have some in depth questioning not just from members. You'd have a counsel there who would be able to ask questions. And I think we'd be able to get more evidence, or get more answers from here. It's very easy. If someone gives a two minute speech and they ask her three questions, she's going to, she's skilled enough, she's going to pick the easiest question and then filibuster for 90 seconds until the time runs out. And she successfully did that when she testified in January, 2013.

HH: If you were on this committee, Congressman DeSantis, do you expect the chief counsel to have the lead role in the questioning the most witnesses?

RD: I think that'll be up to Trey Gowdy. I mean, Trey's obviously very good at this as well, but I think this is going to be an individual who's not going to have to be casting roll call votes, do anything. The person will be committed to this investigation, and I think that that, utilizing somebody who's living and breathing this, even members who get appointed are still going to have to discharge other duties. And so that's a tool that needs to be utilized.

HH: Now you've been a prosecutor, and I know that many people who were prosecutors have been frustrated by this five-headed hydra of committees. Will it take long to get everything under one house with the clearances issues, staffed up, and I hope there's a social media director and a comms director who know what they're doing. How long do you think it'll take to get going?

RD: Well, it shouldn't be that long. I think the most challenging will be educating all the members on the collective work of all the committees. And so you may have people from the Intel Committee get appointed. Well, they need to know what Oversight and what Foreign Affairs will do. And there's a lot of documents, and so the members are going to really have to put their nose to the grindstone. But it does need to get up and running, and we need a unified effort. Look, I called for a select committee from the very beginning, because I foresaw some of these problems. So we have an opportunity to get it right, and we've got to have all hands on deck and do it.

HH: Congressman Ron DeSantis, thank you. I look forward to talking to you often. I hope they put you on this committee. We'll find out tomorrow whom indeed the Speaker intends. People might want to tweet John Boehner @SpeakerBoehner and suggest Ron DeSantis and Mike Pompeo. For Harvard Law School guys, they're not Michigan Law guys, but they're pretty smart guys, and they also are veterans and they know this language. You just might want to tweet the Majority Leader as well, Eric Cantor and John Boehner, and suggest DeSantis and Pompeo.

End of interview.