

# The Record

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## Opinion: Why Benghazi matters

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BY RODNEY FRELINGHUYSEN

***Rodney Frelinghuysen represents New Jersey's 11th Congressional district.***

IN RECENT DAYS, I have been intrigued by assertions that the actions of the Obama administration, the military and the intelligence community leading up to and following the murderous attack on our diplomats in Benghazi, Libya, have been fully vetted and the “facts” are all on the table. Some have gone as far as to ask why the Benghazi raid matters at all.

A remarkably able and effective ambassador was killed in a terrorist assault. Those who were hired to protect him also paid with their lives. All four were left unprotected and apparently abandoned by their own government.

Despite all of the president's declarations about “getting to the bottom” of this, no one individual or organization has been held accountable or responsible. On this point, be assured that our enemies and our friends are watching and learning from our lack of response.

This disaster does matter a great deal. That is precisely why last week I made the decision to co-sponsor House Resolution 36 to establish a Select Committee to investigate the Benghazi attack and the administration's response.

I did not make this decision easily. As a member of the House Appropriations Committee and a proponent of “regular order,” it was my view that existing committees in the House can and should investigate major events and decisions made prior to, during and after the Sept. 11 attack.

However, after recent testimony before Congress, and the president's reaction to it, it has become clear that we must “get to the bottom of” Benghazi and that involves asking tough questions of the State Department, the Defense Department and the intelligence community. While Congress' established committee structure has oversight responsibility in all these areas, no one committee has jurisdiction in all of these key fields. A special select committee with subpoena power will be able to pursue an organized and, hopefully, an expedited investigation and obtain answers to the myriad questions that have been left unanswered:

### **Multiple warnings**

Why were multiple warnings about the deteriorating security environment in Benghazi ignored?

Why did Ambassador Stevens place himself and his security detail at such risk? Did anyone notice that the date was Sept. 11, a key date to jihadists?

As an obvious “hot spot,” why weren’t military units in the region “spun up” and prepared to respond to a potential threat? We can sail ships to every sea, launch aircraft in the sky, utilize satellites in orbit and have “special operators” on alert, but we cannot scramble these forces to aid Americans in Benghazi?

Will anyone be held accountable for having no military resources close enough to reach this dangerous area in a timely manner?

Were orders ever given to organize a rescue mission? Who gave those orders?

Why were State Department personnel at our embassy in Tripoli destroying classified documents and devices at the same time decision-makers in Washington were apparently declaring the attack over?

Where were State Department leaders before and after these attacks evaluating and weighing the situation? How about the CIA and the Defense Department?

Why did it take so long for Congress to have access to the survivors of the attack?

Why were the famous “talking points” used by Ambassador Susan Rice in television interviews to a global audience on Sept. 16 edited by State Department personnel a dozen times?

What effect did Ambassador Rice’s utterances on national TV have on the Libyan government’s support for the U.S. investigation in the days and weeks after the attack?

In fact, the prime sponsor of the resolution establishing the Select Committee, Frank Wolf, R-Va., has an excellent point when he says, “We don’t yet know what we don’t know about Benghazi.”

### **Unanswered questions**

Frankly, I am angry that these questions remain unanswered even for me as a member of the Defense and Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee and one who serves with the House Intelligence Committee.

An organized, comprehensive investigation into events and decisions surrounding Benghazi is not, as some have described it, an insult to the deceased. The president and some partisans have dismissed the various investigations of the Benghazi attack as a product of the political environment that characterizes Washington, D.C., these days. Others have said it’s a witch hunt targeting a likely future presidential candidate.

No, it is Congress’ first responsibility to protect the American people at home and abroad. A select committee on Benghazi would advance that mission.

Civilian or uniformed, Americans serving their country abroad deserve protection and respect for the dangerous missions they assume on our behalf. This tragedy did not need to happen. It is our job to see that it is not repeated.