



PRESS ADVISORY

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35th Anniversary of Iran-Contra Investigation Holds Lessons for January 6th Committee Hearings

Today, the [Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy](#), with the support of the [U.S. Capitol Historical Society](#), released a Portrait in Oversight that describes a congressional investigation that took place 35 years ago into what is now known as the Iran-Contra Affair.

During the summer of 1987, televised congressional hearings examining the Iran-Contra scandal riveted the public for weeks, disclosing dramatic facts involving terrorists, American hostages, weapons sales, taxpayer dollars, and covert operations, as well as an ongoing struggle between the executive and legislative branches over U.S. foreign policy and intelligence activities. In November 1987, the congressional inquiry released a report with its findings.

The investigation now being conducted by the House Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the U.S. Capitol reflects precedents set by the Iran-Contra investigation which was conducted on a bipartisan basis by two select committees formed by the House and Senate. In both investigative efforts, members of Congress on both sides of the aisle worked together to gather evidence, hold hearings, and prepare a report on complex facts. Both inquiries focused attention on the constitutional authority and actions of the president. Both investigations persevered despite partisan pressures, unresolved questions about exactly what happened, and warnings about the impacts on our democracy.

“Congress can compile and analyze important evidence for the American public in a way that no agency, prosecutor, or court can,” said Levin Center director Jim Townsend. “With this special power comes a great responsibility – to put country before partisan interests when presenting facts to the American people. Remembering effective congressional investigations

that largely met that high standard can help guide and inspire Congress to conduct more bipartisan, fact-based, useful inquiries in the years to come.”

The [Iran-Contra Portrait](#) is the latest [in a series of profiles developed by the Levin Center](#) of past congressional investigations and key figures in the history of legislative oversight. Together, the portraits explore congressional oversight from 1792 to the modern era, including inquiries into the Civil War, covert CIA operations, Enron, and Watergate and such figures as Representatives John Dingell and Elijah Cummings and Senators Harry Truman and Joe McCarthy. More portraits will be released later this year.

The Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy works to carry on the legacy of U.S. Senator Carl Levin who championed bipartisan, fact-based oversight and civil discourse. The Center is part of Wayne State University Law School in Detroit, hometown of Senator Levin, but does not necessarily present the views of either the university or law school. The U.S. Capitol Historical Society is a Congressionally chartered, non-partisan, non-profit organization dedicated to educating the public on the history and heritage of the U.S. Capitol.
