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# **Congressional Oversight of the 9-11 Terrorist Attack**

## **A Bipartisan, Fact-Based Inquiry**

Today, the [Levin Center for Oversight and Democracy](#), in collaboration with the [U.S. Capitol Historical Society](#), is releasing a new “Portrait in Oversight” commemorating the first and only bicameral investigation by the Senate and House intelligence committees. The joint investigation examined the intelligence failures leading to the 9-11 terrorist attack on the United States and helped produce key reforms. Its work provides useful precedents and guidance on the handling and review of classified information for current and future investigations.

“Understanding how Congress handled classified information issues in prior investigations like the 9-11 inquiry – as well as Iran-Contra and the Church Committee – can help guide future congressional investigations into such matters as the classified materials at Mar-a-Lago and the U.S. departure from Afghanistan,” said Jim Townsend, director of the Levin Center. “Reminding Congress about the value of bipartisan techniques and precedents is one reason the Levin Center works to preserve congressional investigative history in its series of Portraits in Oversight.”

The 9-11 portrait is the latest in the [oversight profiles developed by the Levin Center](#) (see <https://levin-center.org/oversightscholars/portraits/>) of important congressional investigations and key figures in the history of legislative oversight. Together, the profiles, which are 7 to 20 pages long, 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 Carl Levin. More portraits will be released later this year.

In 2001, after the Al-Qa’ida attack caused the deaths of over 3,000 U.S. individuals, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence conducted a joint investigation into what the intelligence community had missed leading to the tragedy. Under the bipartisan leadership of their respective chairmen, Sen. Bob

Graham (D-FL) and Rep. Porter Goss (R-FL), the two committees hired joint staff who reviewed nearly 500,000 pages of documents, interviewed 300 individuals, and spoke with 600 others from the intelligence community and government organizations. The committees held 22 joint hearings and issued a joint report of over 800 pages, including appendices.

The joint inquiry met a one-year deadline to complete its work, providing a thoughtful, bipartisan approach that reassured the American public in a time of turmoil, anger, and grief. The committees also supported establishment of a bipartisan, independent commission to investigate other aspects of the terrorist attack. The resulting 9-11 Commission held additional hearings and eventually issued its own report.

The analysis and recommendations of the congressional intelligence committees and the 9-11 Commission led to major legislative reforms, including the Homeland Security Act of 2002, which created the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, and the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, which established a new Director of National Intelligence position and a new National Counterterrorism Center, among other measures.

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.

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