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"If we don't have good intelligence, we remain enormously vulnerable," says Jane Lakes Harman '66, photographed in her office on Capitol Hill in April 2005.



# intelligence

**Congresswoman Jane Lakes Harman '66 is putting aside partisan politics and leading the push to secure the country against terrorists**

*On September 10, 2001,* Rep. Jane Lakes Harman '66 and Paul Bremer, the former ambassador who would later become President Bush's envoy to Iraq, met for lunch in Washington. It was a reunion of sorts for Harman and Bremer, who had served together a year earlier on the National Commission on Terrorism, a ten-member board appointed by Congress to review American counterterrorism policies.

With Congress and the White House tussling over tax cuts and the president's initiative to reform public schools, it seemed few people in Washington were heeding the commission's warnings that the United States was ill-prepared to deal with the growing threat of international terrorism. Over lunch, Bremer and Harman worried that the report would, like so many others, be relegated to a dusty shelf.

"We were basically lamenting the fact that no one was listening to us," Harman says.

The next morning, as Harman was heading to a classified briefing in the Capitol, hijacked planes struck the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. Suddenly, the country became far more interested in Harman's warnings about international terrorism.

Since then, the California congresswoman has become one of Washington's most influential voices on intelligence matters. With a penchant for incisive sound bites, she's a favorite on Sunday morning news shows and regularly contributes opinion pieces to the *Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times*. As the highest-ranking Democrat on the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence and a member of the Committee on Homeland Security, she has won praise from both sides of the aisle and was rumored to have been on Sen. John Kerry's short list of candidates for vice president.

"She has become one of the real leaders on Capitol Hill," says Richard K. Betts, director of the International Security Policy program at Columbia University and a member of the National Commission on Terrorism.



Last December, Harman stood behind President Bush as he signed legislation creating a director of national intelligence, for the first time bringing under a single command the fifteen federal agencies responsible for intelligence gathering. Harman, one of the architects of the bill, prominently displays a photograph of the ceremony in the foyer of her House office, where she points it out to visitors.

"The high point of my career in Congress," Harman says of the day.

*September 11 may* have catapulted national security issues into the headlines, but for Harman they have been a focus since she was elected to Congress in 1992. Her Southern California legislative district is home to many of the country's leading defense contractors, including Raytheon and Boeing, making national security a bread-and-butter issue for the congresswoman. Her doggedness on defense matters has earned Harman, who displays a camouflage-clad Barbie doll on an office side table, the nickname "GI Jane."

Still, it took Harman until 1996 to win a spot on the prestigious intelligence panel, where, she admits, she faced a huge

learning curve. "It seems like you're learning a foreign language," she says. "Not some Romance language, but one with a bizarre alphabet."

Behind the secured doors of the committee room, Harman discovered a culture, half a decade after the fall of the Berlin wall, that remained caught in the cold war and slow to change. Harman says she has been disturbed by American intelligence services' struggle to develop good "human intelligence"—the critical data supplied by individual informants on the ground—a shortcoming made clear by the dispute over the existence of weapons of mass destruction in the months leading up to the war in Iraq.

"If we don't have good intelligence, we remain enormously vulnerable," Harman says.

In a world where a good quip almost guarantees you face time on the evening news, Harman is quick with the one-liner and skilled at distilling complicated concepts into easy-to-understand points. "We will not learn anything on the cocktail-party circuit," she told the Council on Foreign Relations in arguing for a less clubby, more diverse intelligence community. She once disparagingly dubbed then-Homeland Security

Secretary Tom Ridge an "interior decorator" for focusing more on issuing color-coded warnings than on offering explicit public-safety guidelines. Ridge called her the next morning and asked if she wanted her kitchen painted.

Harman's ability to translate the language of the shadowy intelligence community into plain English has made her an effective spokeswoman, particularly for Democrats, who are often seen as weak on defense issues, says former Speaker of the House Thomas Foley, who first appointed her to the committee. "She is attractive and articulate and brings great authority to what she says," Foley says. "It's an additional dimension of her influence."

At the same time, Harman is able to ford partisan boundaries, a rarity in politically polarized Washington but a necessity in her congressional district, which stretches along the Los Angeles County coastline. Like her constituents, Harman—a member of the congressional Blue Dog Coalition, a caucus of middle-of-the-road Democrats—has a moderate record on taxes and spending but takes more progressive stances on issues like abortion and the environment.

Together with Republican Saxby Chambliss, now a senator from Georgia, Harman produced a bipartisan

## security is a **women's issue**

*With the most dramatic overhaul of the American intelligence infrastructure in six decades to her credit, it's natural to wonder what's next for Jane Harman.*

Her national security expertise, gender, and moderate political profile have landed her on hypothetical lists for top intelligence and defense positions in both Democrat and Republican administrations. She told CNN talk show host Larry King last year that she was "flattered" to be considered vice presidential material. Harman, who gave up her House seat in 1998 to run unsuccessfully for governor of California, also is mentioned as a potential candidate for higher office.

*(Harman spent her time out of office serving on the terrorism commission and teaching international relations at the University of California at Los Angeles. She agreed to run for her old congressional seat in 2000 after negotiating a deal with House Democratic leaders that would allow her, if she won, to reclaim her seniority and her position on the intelligence panel.)*

Thomas Foley, the former House speaker, says Harman has the capacity to succeed at whatever she puts her mind to. "She's extraordinarily intelligent and has the capacity to follow complicated policy issues," he says. "As much as I have always admired and had an extraordinarily high opinion of her, I think she's exceeded all my expectations."

For her part, Harman has set a challenging agenda. She plans to closely monitor the transformation of the intelligence community envisioned in the legislation she helped draft. She has called for the revamping of the current terror alert system, unveiled in the days after September 11, a system that she criticizes as dangerously and needlessly vague.

An immediate goal is to see that a woman is appointed to head one of the intelligence agencies.

"It's a glass ceiling that needs to be broken," she says.

To Harman, intelligence is a women's domain. "I worry about my kids, and I worry about other people's kids as well," says Harman, the mother of four: Brian, 31, Hillary, 29, Daniel, 22, and Justine, 20. "We're the people who protect our families, our homes. I think security is naturally a women's issue." —KF





## HARMAN'S HISTORY

**Hometown** Los Angeles, California

**Smith house** Tyler

**Smith major** Government

### Key moments in her career:

**1960** Harman interns at the Democratic National Convention, where John F. Kennedy is nominated

**1977** Harman joins Carter administration as deputy secretary to the cabinet

**1992** Harman is elected to Congress

**1998** She gives up her seat in Congress to run for the Democratic nomination for California governor, but loses to Gray Davis

**1999** Harman is asked to serve on the National Commission on Terrorism, which later issues a report warning of potential terrorist attacks

**2000** Harman is reelected to Congress

**2001** Harman is appointed top Democrat on House committee examining September 11 terrorist attacks

**2003** She becomes ranking Democrat on House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence

**2004** Harman stands next to President Bush as he signs legislation enacting sweeping changes to the country's intelligence system

Harman would like to see a woman lead one of the government's intelligence committees. "We're the people who protect our families, our homes," she says.



## harman's stance on the issues

Although Rep. Jane Lakes Harman '66 is in the headlines for her work on intelligence and national security matters, she plays an active role in other legislative debates. Here are her positions on several other high-profile issues, based on public statements and congressional votes:



### The economy.

With the federal deficit hitting record highs, Harman has joined with fellow congressional moderates in calling for a balanced budget. She supports a budget-reform plan that would establish a rainy-day fund for national emergencies, freeze the budget of any government agency that cannot balance its books, and require all new spending to be paid for by cuts in other programs or additional revenue.

**The environment.** Harman scored a perfect 100 percent with environmental groups during the last session of Congress. She opposes drilling off the California coast and in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and has called for greater reliance on clean energy sources and conservation.



### Same-sex marriage.

Harman has opposed a federal ban on same-sex marriage, which she argues is a state issue. She also has supported legislation to prohibit employers from discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation and to allow gay and lesbian workers to take up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave to care for a seriously ill domestic partner.



**Social Security reform.** Harman has proposed cordoning off Social Security funds from the rest of the federal budget so they cannot be used to pay for tax cuts or spending increases. The money should be invested to ensure Social Security's future solvency, Harman says.

**Abortion.** A supporter of keeping abortion legal, Harman has pressed for expanded access to preventive healthcare services and comprehensive sex education. She opposed a bill that recognized fetuses as separate victims in crimes against pregnant women, saying it could undermine the right to an abortion.



**War in Iraq.** The congresswoman voted for the resolution to permit President Bush to use military force in Iraq. Although she doesn't regret her vote, Harman now says she wishes lawmakers were presented with more policy options prior to military action and has supported reviews of pre-war intelligence. "We all got it wrong," she told a foreign-policy audience last year.



House report examining intelligence failures leading up to September 11. She also teamed with Republican lawmakers to secure money to improve the nation's bioterrorism infrastructure and to pass legislation requiring the federal government to share information about critical threats with state and local authorities.

"She has pressed for intelligence reform, but she hasn't used it as a political football," says Betts, the Columbia professor.

The biggest test of Harman's skills came last fall, when she was one of four key negotiators who hammered out the most sweeping restructuring of the nation's intelligence system since the end of World War II. The measure was declared dead several times. But despite opposition—from Pentagon officials protective of their turf, Republicans seeking tougher immigration protections, and Democrats arguing for even broader powers for the new intelligence director—the group was eventually able to win final passage of the bill. In addition to creating a national intelligence director, the reform legislation establishes a National Counterterrorism Intelligence Center to plan intelligence missions and coordinate information on terrorism threats.

"If we had not had Jane as the representative of the House Democrats, we might not have been able to get a bill," says Maine Sen. Susan Collins, the Republican chairwoman of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs and one of the four negotiators. "She was committed to putting aside partisan and political differences to try to achieve the bill."

*Jane Lakes' political passions* were sparked early. While attending high school in Los Angeles, she ran for treasurer of her class (she lost) and once predicted to friends and family that she would one day be president of the United States. By the time she arrived at Smith in 1962, she was a veteran of the 1960 Democratic convention in Los Angeles, where, while working as an intern, she was inspired by the young nominee—and future president—John F. Kennedy.

On campus, she "definitely was an activist," recalls Philip Green, a professor emeritus of government who advised Harman on her senior thesis. The Tyler House resident volunteered on campaigns, interned in Washington, and even brought senator and future presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey to campus. In her thesis, the government major critiqued California's ballot initiative system. Green calls the paper one of the two best in his teaching career. "It was exceptional," says Green, who continues to cite Harman's essay in courses. "Incredibly prescient. At the time, I thought it was publishable."

After graduating with high honors, Harman earned a degree at Harvard Law School and then headed for Washington, where she quickly rose through the congressional staff ranks

**Harman Donates Personal Papers to Smith**  
**Jane Lakes Harman '66 has donated papers from her first three terms in Congress to the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College. The papers—all 270 boxes of them—will be invaluable to scholars of U.S. politics and political history, according to Sherrill Redmon, head of the Sophia Smith Collection. "There aren't many collections of the papers of women in Congress available for research yet," she said. "When the collection opens next year, it will offer students entrée into how a Congressional office works and how committees function." A celebration to mark the official opening of Harman's papers is being planned for next spring.**

to become the first female chief counsel and staff director of a Senate Judiciary subcommittee. Her first marriage ended in divorce. While serving in the Carter administration as a deputy cabinet secretary, she met her husband Sidney, founder of audio giant Harman International, who was then undersecretary of commerce.

After President Carter's loss, Harman remained in Washington, raising four children, working as an attorney in private practice, and building up an impressive Rolodex. She put her connections to use in 1992 when, despite not having lived in California since she left for Smith, she decided to run for Congress.

Her opponent attacked her as a carpetbagger, but Harman managed to capture the Republican-leaning district on a "pro-choice, pro-change" platform.

Her goal: "To work on tough problems," she says. "And intelligence very much is one."

*The sun is setting behind* the Capitol dome on one recent evening, but Harman's office is a buzz of activity. After a full day of meetings and briefings, canceled and shuffled and rescheduled, her staff looks tired, but Harman is fresh.

This is typical Harman, say those who know her well—always operating at top speed, mentally and physically.

"She is one of the most energetic people I've ever seen," says Collins, who grew close to Harman during their work on the intelligence bill. When the Maine senator visited Harman at her California home, the pair went for a brisk walk on the beach. "She slowed down to walk with me," amends Collins.

Harman burns off the stress of her job by putting on her running shoes. "Besides, it's a way for a woman with four kids to keep from looking old," she says, laughing. Harman plans to run the Marine Corps Marathon in October, although she notes there is still "time to chicken out." She takes aerobics classes and joined the Congressional Surfing Caucus after her staff gave her a surfboard for her 53rd birthday.

When Congress was embroiled in a debate several years ago about women's readiness for combat, Harman decided to go to a military base in South Carolina and take the physical fitness test administered to new recruits. As a memento, she keeps a photograph of a bullet-headed Marine Corps drill instructor scrutinizing her technique to make sure she didn't do any "girl pushups." She didn't.

Harman sets a model as a strong, articulate woman in an arena where there aren't many, says Juliette N. Kayyem, a professor at Harvard University Kennedy School of Government who served with Harman on the National Commission on Terrorism. "She is not a wilting flower," Kayyem says. "She can talk the talk of the big boys, and they respect that." **Q**

*Karin Fischer '96 is a writer in Washington, D.C.*