

RAMS Speech July 16, 2014

Paul, thanks so much for that kind introduction and thanks for having me today.

You know since I have announced my retirement from Congress I am thrilled to be invited anywhere. I'm not used to this size of a group though, these days if I can get two or three people willing to listen to me I am doing pretty well!

Let's see – you all are current and former Chiefs of Staff and Staff Directors. It's interesting that all of my current and former Chiefs of Staff and Staff Directors have informed me just how important and prestigious this group is. They told me I could feel the power emanating from the room merely from walking by the Capitol Hill Club on the street. Man, were they right! Heck, I bet even Bill Gates was intimidated by this bunch!

You know I am really happy to be here speaking with you today. Believe me, I know how critical you all to making a Member office run and how integral you all are to our House Republican majority. We wouldn't have earned the trust from the American people to be in charge without dedicated public servants like each of you who often don't get the credit you deserve. Each of my Chiefs of Staff and Staff Directors is so much more than an employee to me because these jobs are so personal. At times they all have been a top campaign strategist, a driver, a top policy advisor, a travel agent, keeper of the dirty laundry or a tour guide but most importantly each of them is a friend and essentially a part of my family.

I wanted to talk with you today about a couple of things. I thought I would first talk about the world and where we find ourselves. And then I thought I would talk a bit about the Congress as an institution. And believe me, any advice I have is worth what you paid for it.

You know we are at a pretty interesting time in history when you think about it. If you were ever wondering what the world would look like without American leadership, just turn on the TV these days.

The world is probably more unstable now than at any time since the 1970s.

Russia invaded and stole Crimea from Ukraine. For the first time since Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in 1991, one nation attempted to take territory from another through military force.

We just traded five Taliban leaders for guy who left his post. In case the White House didn't get the memo, we are still at war with the Taliban in Afghanistan. And we negotiated the trade with the Haqqani network, which the United States of America considers a foreign terrorist organization.

China is methodically pushing out their area of influence into the South and East China Seas to impact trade and the world order in general.

We had a U.S. Ambassador and three other Americans killed in the Benghazi terrorist attack that was conducted by dozens. One individual has been brought to justice.

Iran is on the brink of getting legitimacy from the international community to maintain a nuclear weapons program, preserving for the ruling Mullahs in Iran the ability to quickly develop a nuclear weapon if they so choose. This threatens Israel with annihilation and would send the world's most volatile region into a nuclear arms race.

And now we have come to what has been the worst fear for years from those of us who care about national security. An al Qaeda minded terrorist organization is governing an area the size of Indiana over territory in Iraq and Syria. They are in charge. And they are flying helicopters, are flush with cash, are driving tanks and acquiring some of the world's most dangerous weapons.

All of this is to the detriment of America's national security interests. You would hardly know it from the response at the White House.

Occasionally you will get a tepid statement from our reluctant Commander in Chief on these subjects, usually with legalistic language filled with caveats highlighting to our enemies exactly what we won't do.

Occasionally the public relations of national security gets their attention at the White House and you'll get a sad selfie on Twitter with a trending hashtag.

But I have to tell you. Brutal al Qaida terrorists in remote parts of Africa don't respond to selfies. And Vladimir Putin in his effort to restore Russia's greatness doesn't respond to hashtags.

All of America's enemies respond to one thing – action.

It doesn't mean the United States has to be the world's policeman and it doesn't mean the United States needs to fight wars in every country where there is trouble. It does mean we should unapologetically pursue our security and economic interests with vigor around the globe - just as every nation has done in the history of man. And we have lots of tools at our disposal to shape events in our interests.

Now I wanted to talk for a minute about this great institution of Congress that we all cherish. Our founders created this place to be about big things and big ideas. I'm a House guy so all you Senate folks may want to cover your ears. Abraham Lincoln served in the House of Representatives, so did Nixon and Ford. Dick Cheney has said his service in the House of Representatives was among his most significant in his long history of public service. He also said his absolute favorite time in government was on the House Intelligence Committee but I might be a little biased on that.

You know I believe that the American people elected us in part to do something. I have always been a big believer in the Reagan mantra of take an 80% deal any day of the week. And then, when you wake up in the morning, you go after the other 20%. At some point just voting no on everything stops being courageous and starts being convenient and a cop out from the responsibility to offer conservative solutions to the problems confronting our nation and our people. If we don't act, the debt increases, taxes stay too high and regulations stay too burdensome. And that threatens the American dream and the biggest middle class on the face of the earth.

Public service can and should be an honorable thing. Let's not get bogged down in the sometimes profitable politics of the small. I hope you'll stay engaged. I hope you'll fight the urge to be cynical and I hope you'll continue to push your boss to do what's right.

Let's work every day like it was the first day you came to work in Washington and looked up at that beautiful dome and thought what an incredible honor it was to work here and what a difference you could make for the nation. Because it is. And you can.

I'll close with one last story. Serving as Chairman of the House Intelligence Committee has been one of the greatest honors of my life. It has allowed me to travel all around world representing my fellow Americans and the United States government. A few years back I was overseas in a pretty tough, remote neighborhood meeting with some of America's finest Special Forces personnel.

These folks were in such a hostile neighborhood that they couldn't wear their uniforms outside and had grown long beards to go native. Well it so happened that when I was there one of the enlisted men was up for a promotion and I was asked to read the promotion orders, which is a great honor. Well, these are big, tough, burly dudes so we all huddle into one of the tents. To not raise suspicion of the locals we shaded the windows over and one of the guys grabbed one of those small American flags you might carry during a 4th of July parade and he holds it up behind the soldier I am promoting.

As I am reading the orders the guys started singing the Star Spangled Banner in a hushed whisper. We all joined in.

I'm pretty sure we got a verse wrong. And I know we all were all out of key. But I have to tell you, it was the most beautiful thing I have ever heard.

This reinforced to me that if they can risk their lives in the toughest places on earth to protect us, we can do our part here. If they can sacrifice everything with no glory or no credit to themselves, we can at least try to do our part. And it cemented my view that America is a pretty incredible place with pretty incredible citizens willing to volunteer to do this for us in the most God-awful places on earth.

Thanks again for having me today and thanks for what you do. I'd be happy to take some of your questions.