



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on October 31, 2009

House Committee Investigates Jane Harman

A House Democrat who once claimed to "live and breathe security" has been under investigation this year for allegedly promising to use her influence to gain leniency for two "pro-Israeli lobbyists" in exchange for support of her own effort to gain the chairmanship of the House Intelligence Committee, the *Washington Post* reported Friday.



Rep. Jane Harman, an eight-term member from Venice, California is one of 30 representatives and several aides being investigated by the House Ethics Committee on issues that include defense lobbying and corporate influence peddling, according to the *Post*. She has come under the scrutiny of committee investigators due to wiretapped telephone conversations she had in 2005 with an "Israeli operative," in which she allegedly offered to intervene on behalf of the accused lobbyists in exchange for help in getting the coveted committee chair. The *Post* did not identify the lobbyists or say what they were accused of, but a *Los Angeles Times* story earlier this year referred to reports that "Harman was heard on a wiretap speaking to a suspected Israeli agent about two AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) lobbyists accused of illegally passing classified information to foreign officials and reporters."

Harman has said she did not contact either the White House or the Justice Department about the two lobbyists. Federal prosecutors last April dropped charges against the former AIPAC lobbyists, the *Times* reported, saying that recent court rulings had made it unlikely they could win convictions.

Harman had described the wiretaps as an abuse of government power, but sources told the *Washington Post* that it was not Harman's phone that was tapped but that of the suspected Israeli agent with whom she conversed. In June of this year, a Justice Department official wrote a letter to Harman's lawyer saying she was "neither a subject nor a target" of a criminal investigation, according to the *Post* story.

But an April 20 *New York Times* report, based on statements from unnamed "current and former government officials," said an official who had seen transcripts of several wiretapped calls described Harman as agreeing to intercede on behalf of the lobbyists in exchange for help in persuading party



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leaders to give her the chairmanship. The official said someone seeking help for the AIPAC lobbyists was recorded asking Harman, a longtime supporter of the organization, to intervene with the Justice Department. According to the official, Harman said she would have more influence with a White House official whom she did not identify. The caller reportedly promised her that media mogul Haim Saban, a wealthy California donor, would threaten to withhold campaign contributions to Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), the likely Speaker when the Democrats regained control of Congress, if Pelosi would not appoint Harman chairman of the Intelligence Committee. Harman was the committee's ranking Democrat at the time.

According to the *Times*, Harman was one of the very few members of Congress with wide access to intelligence information, including information about wiretapping carried out by the Bush administration that came to light in December of 2005. She was "swept up" by National Security Administration eavesdropping, the paper said, citing "three current or former senior officials" as sources.

Harman, 64, is a native of New York City, but grew up in Los Angeles. Her involvement in Democratic Party politics goes back to at least 1960, when, at age 15, she was an usher at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. After Smith College and Harvard Law School, she worked in the U.S. Senate for Sen. John Tunney and for the Senate Judiciary Committee and worked in the White House during the presidency of Jimmy Carter. In 1979, she became a special counsel at the Pentagon. The following year, she married her second husband Sidney Harman, founder of the audio equipment company Harman International Industries. Harman is ranked among the richest members of Congress with a net worth of between \$236 million to \$558 million, according to her 2008 disclosure forms.

She was first elected to Congress in 1992, when she ran on the slogan "Pro-choice, Pro-change." She is described on the website WhoRunsGov.com as "progressive on social and women's issues while being a fiscal conservative and a supporter of a strong national defense." She served for three terms before leaving Congress to run for governor of California in 1998. In a three-way contest for the Democratic nomination, Harman ran against then-Lieutenant Governor Gray Davis and former airlines mogul Al Checchi. In a campaign notable for its spending spree, Harman put up \$11.6 million of her own money, but was heavily outspent by Checchi, who went through \$37 million of his fortune. Gray won the nomination and the election, while Harman garnered just 20 percent of the primary vote.

In 2000, she left her teaching job at UCLA to run again for her former congressional seat. She won by less than two percentage points and went back onto the House Intelligence Committee, where she had become the top ranking Democrat by the time the party won back control of Congress in 2006. Harman, who once said, "I live and breathe security 24-7," was eager to become the committee chairman. But according to media reports she had fallen out of favor with fellow Californian and soon-to-be speaker Pelosi. Some attribute the disfavor to Harman's high visibility as another powerful Californian and natural rival to Pelosi. It may also have been due to political and ideological differences. Harman, who once claimed she was proud to be called "the best Republican in the Democratic Party," is more conservative than most Democrats on military and foreign policy issues. She parted with Pelosi in voting for authorization of the Iraq War and later took heat from party members for being slow to criticize President Bush on the Iraq War and the administration's domestic surveillance operations. When the Democrats took over the House, Harman was replaced on the Intelligence Committee by Texas Democrat Silvestre Reyes, but was assigned to the Committee on Homeland Security, where she now chairs the subcommittee on Intelligence, Information Sharing and Risk Assessment.



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According to the *Post* article, the House Ethics Committee on June 9 of this year authorized subpoenas to be issued to the Justice Department, the National Security Agency and the FBI for "certain intercepted communications" involving Harman. According to a former government official, the Justice Department declined to respond to the subpoena. Harman told the paper the ethics committee had not contacted her and that she has no knowledge that the subpoena was ever issued. "I don't believe that's true," she said. "As far as I'm concerned, this smear has been over for three years."

The *Post* said a confidential report, prepared in July, on the committee's investigation of Harman and other representatives and staff members "appears to have been inadvertently placed on a publicly accessible computer network, and it was provided to the *Washington Post* by a source not connected to the congressional investigations." The paper described the Ethics Committee as "one of the most secretive panels in Congress, and its members and staff members sign oaths not to disclose any activities related to its past or present investigations."

The committee announced over the summer that it was reviewing lawmakers with connections to the now-closed PMA Group, a lobbying firm. But the document received by the *Post* shows the inquiry was broader than indicated, the paper said, and included a review of seven members the House Appropriations Defense Subcommittee who have steered federal money to the firm's clients and have also received large campaign contributions.

California Democrat Maxine Waters, a high-ranking member of the House Financial Services Committee, is among those under scrutiny concerning the relationship between their personal finances and their congressional activities. Waters, whose husband owns at least \$250,000 worth of stock in OneUnited Bank of Massachusetts, arranged a September, 2008 meeting at the Treasury Department, where executives of that bank asked for government assistance. In December, OneUnited was among the first companies selected for the bank bailout program, receiving \$12.1 million.

House Ways and Means Chairman Charles Rangel acknowledged he spoke to committee staff members about a conference he and four other member of the Congressional Black Caucus attended last November in St. Martin. The three-day event at a luxury resort was underwritten by major corporations, including Citigroup, Pfizer, and AT&T. House rules adopted in 2007 forbid private companies from paying for congressional travel. Rangel said he has not discussed other parts of the investigation of his private finances with the committee.

"I'm waiting for that anxiously," he told the *Post*.

Photo: Rep. Jane Harman



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