



# MR. CHAIRMAN

*Lamar Smith '75*

Lamar Smith went to law school with the dream of one day becoming a Texas Justice of the Peace. The job was part-time but still paid well and sometimes provided a county-owned car to those in the office.

While that dream remains unfulfilled, the 63-year-old Southern Methodist University Dedman School of Law alum (Class of 1975) has done okay in the three decades since graduating. In January, he was named by his peers in the U.S. House of Representatives to be the Chairman of the powerful Judiciary Committee.

“It’s not Justice of the Peace, but it’s not a bad view either,” said Rep. Smith, who gazes out his Rayburn House Office Building window across Independence Avenue at an unobstructed view of the U.S. Capitol. “I have been extraordinarily blessed to have one of the best jobs in the country. My time at SMU Law School certainly helped prepare me for this position.”

Rep. Smith was first elected to Congress as a Republican in 1987. His district, Texas’ 21st, includes parts of Austin and San Antonio, as well as most of the Texas Hill Country. Besides being the Chairman of the House Judiciary Committee, he serves on the Committee on Homeland Security and the Committee on Science, Space and Technology.

The Chairman, who was born in San Antonio, is a fifth-generation Texan. He graduated from the Episcopal School of Texas, which is a co-ed college preparatory school in San Antonio. He graduated in 1969 from Yale University, where he majored in American Studies.



Above: While in law school, LAMAR SMITH '75, was editor of Southern Methodist University's school newspaper, *The Adversary*.



Clockwise, from left: FORMER FIRST LADY BARBARA BUSH, LAMAR SMITH '75, Secret Service Agent, and FORMER PRESIDENT GEORGE BUSH, SR. exiting Air Force One.



**Lamar Smith '75**

He spent a couple of years as a writer for the *Christian Science Monitor* before applying to law school.

"I went to law school because I knew it was a great education no matter what I decided to do in life."

"My two grandfathers were lawyers," says Rep. Smith. "But I went to law school because I knew it was a great education no matter what I decided to do in life."

Young Lamar had his choice of law schools, but selected SMU in 1972 because the Dallas job market offered more opportunities for his wife. The couple rented a little apartment in Highland Park. Their television sat on a cardboard box because they couldn't afford a table.

While at SMU, Rep. Smith was editor of the law school's newspaper, which he changed from being named *The Adversary* to *The Advocate*. During his year as editor, *The Advocate* won an award from the American Bar Association for best law school

newspaper. He also took flying lessons and obtained his pilot's license during his time at SMU Dedman School of Law.

"Had I known that I would become the chair of the House Judiciary Committee, I would have taken more advanced constitutional law courses," he says. "My favorite classes were tax and law and society."

Upon graduating law school, Rep. Smith handled wills, estates, and family law. But he quickly became interested in politics. In 1980, he was elected to the Texas House of Representatives. He served as a Bexar County Commissioner from 1982 to 1985.

In 1986, he successfully ran for Texas' 21st House District. He easily won re-election a dozen times since. Rep. Smith served as chair of the House Ethics Committee and as a member of the powerful House Budget Committee for several years.

The first piece of legislation that Rep. Smith introduced when he arrived in Congress was to expand Big Bend National Park in West Texas by forty percent.

"Even such a non-controversial bill took nearly two years to pass," he says. "But I was so proud when President Reagan signed it into law."

When the Republicans became the majority party in 2010, he was named

the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee – an august body whose previous chairs include Daniel Webster and James Buchanan.

"I would like to say that I have no plans to run for President or write a dictionary," he says.

"There is no question that my legal education has helped me and my work on the Judiciary Committee," says Rep. Smith. "Law school helped me know how to analyze extremely complex situations. Law school teaches you how to argue both sides of a case or an issue. It gives you that ability to deal with the daily legal situations that I confront."

More than one thousand pieces of legislation were referred to the House Judiciary Committee during the past term. The topics ranged from terrorism and civil liberties to bankruptcy and immigration reform.

A major priority on his agenda for the year ahead is patent reform.

"We must streamline the patent system," he says, "because it is the backbone of technology and creativity. Patent reform is about justice and the economy." ■