

Heather Sawyer

Special Counsel



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Congressional Investigations
White Collar Defense and Investigations
Workplace Investigations

Heather is special counsel in Cooley's congressional investigations practice. With more than a decade of service in the US House and Senate, Heather leverages an insider's understanding of high-stakes investigations to help clients navigate complex congressional, governmental and internal risk management matters.

For 13 years, Heather served as a trusted adviser to leading members of Congress, crafting and executing strategic plans for high-profile investigations and congressional hearings. She led several major congressional investigations, serving as chief counsel to the House Select Committee on Benghazi, staff director and general counsel for the Select Panel of the House Energy and Commerce Committee, and staff director and general counsel for the Senate Judiciary Committee. From this work, Heather brings deep experience and a unique set of skills – combining rigorous legal analysis, strategic problem solving and a deep understanding of politics and public relations risks – to her clients at Cooley.

In her work on congressional investigations and high-profile hearings, Heather has:

- Prepared high-ranking Cabinet officials and other presidential nominees for Senate confirmation hearings and prepared witnesses appearing on a range of subjects before the Senate and House Judiciary Committees and House Committee on Oversight and Accountability.
- First-chaired hundreds of witness interviews, including dozens of top administration officials.
- Negotiated extensive document requests involving multiple executive branch agencies and private companies and managed the review of hundreds of thousands of sensitive documents.

A recognized authority in the field of congressional investigations, Heather served on the Senate Judiciary Committee under Ranking Member Dianne Feinstein from 2017 to 2020, first as the chief oversight counsel and quickly advancing to general counsel and staff director. In these roles, Heather managed a team of 45 attorneys and staff, which conducted hundreds of congressional investigations and hearings, including confirmations of US Supreme Court justices.

In the House of Representatives, Heather served as lead attorney for two special investigative committees – the House Select Committee on Benghazi and the Select Panel of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. She also served on the House Judiciary Committee from 2007 to 2014, as chief counsel of the Subcommittee on Courts, Intellectual Property and the Internet, and as counsel for the Subcommittee on Constitution, where she was lead counsel for the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act and the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act.

In remarks recognizing her service to the House, Representatives John Conyers, Elijah Cummings, Jerry

Nadler and Jan Schakowsky lauded Heather as “a bright, strategic, and immensely skilled attorney who has never faced a challenge she could not meet.” They recognized her command of House procedures and rules, along with “her brilliant legal analysis and oversight acumen,” as well as her “calm, clear-eyed professionalism” in handling difficult, polarized investigations.

Heather also has been recognized for her work litigating groundbreaking civil rights cases in Lambda Legal's Chicago office, where she spent a decade developing integrated strategies – combining litigation, public advocacy, politics and media engagement – to advance key civil rights for individuals and families throughout the Midwest. Her work won awards from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Illinois, AIDS Foundation of Chicago, AIDS Legal Council of Chicago, the Names Project Foundation, Howard Brown Health Center, and the Chicago LGBT Hall of Fame.

Immediately prior to joining Cooley, Heather served as the executive director of American Oversight, a non partisan, non profit organization that advances transparency and accountability by enforcing the public's right to government records. In that role, Heather managed a 35-person staff and set the team's strategic and operational goals – including developing litigation priorities and using strategic communications plans to leverage the impact of records obtained through federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests and state public records laws.

From 2005 to 2007, Heather ran the Legislative Law Clinic at Georgetown University Law Center and taught law students how to combine rigorous legal analysis with an understanding of political realities.

Education

University of Chicago Law School
JD, 1991

Dartmouth College
BA, Rufus Choate Scholar, magna cum laude, 1986

Admissions & Credentials

Illinois

District of Columbia