

Interviewing History: Judge William Webster



Judge Bill Webster with interviewers Kathleen McInnis, Will Sullivan, Viviane Leffingwell, Andre Belelieu (left to right)

On May 17th, Andre Belelieu (Transatlantic Business), Kathleen McInnis (International Security Program), Viviane Leffingwell (Americas Program), and Will Sullivan (Burke Chair), interviewed the Honorable William H. Webster as part of AILA's latest series, *Interviewing History*. The interview focused on ABSCAM; an FBI sting operation that began in the late 1970's and resulted in the indictment of over a dozen congressmen. Judge Webster, FBI director at the time of the indictments, provided insight into the controversial operation and helped the audience, most of whom were too young to remember ABSCAM, draw parallels to today's intelligence community.

To set the tone for the evening, the interview team opened the event with a narrated video about ABSCAM, complete with TV news clips and footage of the undercover agents. The interview team then asked Judge Webster to comment on the development of the operation, the allegations of entrapment, and the consequences of such an investigation.

In reference to both the ABSCAM era and current FBI operations, Judge Webster said discipline is vital in balancing covert projects with transparency and trust. While deception, he said, is a necessity in the intelligence community, the amount of secrecy that the people will tolerate depends on the trust the agencies have earned. To emphasize his point, Judge Webster referenced David Abshire's philosophy that "trust is the coin of the realm."



Interviewer Andre Belelieu asks a question



Viviane Leffingwell and Will Sullivan compare



Judge Webster signs a memento for Kathleen McInnis