“So it was actually pretty quiet by the time I got out of the building. It actually felt a little eerie in that there weren’t a lot of people left. When you got outside, there were police sirens all over the place. Capitol Police were running around, doing different things, but there weren’t a lot of people themselves left on the Hill, going to the Metro.”

Brett Heimov
May 16, 2011
# Table of Contents

- Project Abstract  
  - i  
- Editing Practices  
  - ii  
- Citation Information  
  - ii  
- Interviewer Biography  
  - iii  
- Interview  
  - 1
Project Abstract

To commemorate the events of September 11, 2001, the Office of the House Historian conducted a series of interviews with former Members and staff of the U.S. House of Representatives. This collection of oral histories provides a multi-layered narrative of the events on Capitol Hill that day, from the morning floor proceedings, to the evacuation of the Capitol and House Office Buildings, to the press conference and impromptu gathering on the Capitol steps that evening.

These accounts reveal how the House responded to the challenges facing the nation in the weeks and months following the attack. Interviewees describe the return to work on September 12, the President’s address to a Joint Session on September 20, and the immediate changes in the legislative schedule. Some recall the implementation of new security measures, including restrictions on the mail in response to the subsequent anthrax scare. Several interviewees shed light on the role of Member offices in recovery and support efforts in the regions most affected by the violence. Individually, each interview offers insight into the long-term procedural changes that fundamentally altered the daily workings of the House. Together, the project’s collective perspective illuminates the way this dramatic event transformed the nation, from Capitol Hill to congressional districts.
Editing Practices

In preparing interview transcripts for publication, the editors sought to balance several priorities:

- As a primary rule, the editors aimed for fidelity to the spoken word and the conversational style in accord with generally accepted oral history practices.
- The editors made minor editorial changes to the transcripts in instances where they believed such changes would make interviews more accessible to readers. For instance, excessive false starts and filler words were removed when they did not materially affect the meaning of the ideas expressed by the interviewee.
- In accord with standard oral history practices, interviewees were allowed to review their transcripts, although they were encouraged to avoid making substantial editorial revisions and deletions that would change the conversational style of the transcripts or the ideas expressed therein.
- The editors welcomed additional notes, comments, or written observations that the interviewees wished to insert into the record and noted any substantial changes or redactions to the transcript.
- Copy-editing of the transcripts was based on the standards set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*.

The first reference to a Member of Congress (House or Senate) is underlined in the oral history transcript. For more information about individuals who served in the House or Senate, please refer to the online *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, [http://bioguide.congress.gov](http://bioguide.congress.gov) and the “People Search” section of the History, Art & Archives website, [http://history.house.gov](http://history.house.gov).

For more information about the U.S. House of Representatives oral history program contact the Office of House Historian at (202) 226-1300, or via email at history@mail.house.gov.

Citation Information

When citing this oral history interview, please use the format below:
Interviewer Biography

Kathleen Johnson is the Manager of Oral History for the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. She earned a B.A. in history from Columbia University, where she also played basketball for four years, and holds two master’s degrees from North Carolina State University in education and public history. In 2004, she helped to create the House’s first oral history program, focusing on collecting the institutional memory of Members and staff. She co-authored two books: Women in Congress: 1917–2006 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006) and Black Americans in Congress: 1870–2007 (GPO, 2008). Before joining the Office of the Historian, she worked as a high school history teacher and social studies curriculum consultant.
JOHNSON: This is Kathleen Johnson with the Office of the House Historian. The date is May 16, 2011, and we’re in the House Recording Studio. Today I’m here with Brett Heimov, who is the former administrative assistant for Representative Jerrold [Lewis] Nadler of New York. We’re here today to discuss his memories of September 11, 2001, and the anthrax scare in October of 2011. To start with today, I was hoping that you could trace your personal memories of September 11, beginning with how your morning started.

HEIMOV: Yes, sure. It was a typical morning. Get up, get ready to go to work. I know I was dressing casual that day because the Congressman wasn’t going to be in the office. Got into the office, obviously, a little while before 9:00. Turned on the TV to check out the news of the day, see what was happening, and saw that a plane had crashed into the World Trade Center. The World Trade Center is located in Congressman Nadler’s district, so the first thing I did was pick up the phone and called him to make sure he was seeing what was going on because he actually had been in Washington all weekend for a conference with his wife. I talked to him, and he said he was watching the news and saw what’s going on. I hung up the phone and continued to work that morning.

Then, obviously, the TV was still on, and watched as the second plane flew into the Tower. At that moment, like most other people, I realized this was a terrorist attack, or some type of attack on the United States. So picked up the phone again, called the Congressman. He had seen what was happening, and his first instinct was to get back to New York, number one, because his son was actually still back in New York by himself, since both his parents were in...
DC at the time, and also, obviously, being his district. We talked about it and figured out instantly that the airplanes weren’t going to be flying much longer. He headed to the train station to try and make his way back to New York. We stayed in our office, and we were trying to track what was going on, calling back to New York, trying to figure out what was happening. It was also primary day in New York City, so most of our staff in our New York office had taken the day off to go work on various campaign sites and polling sites and things like that. So it was a little difficult back then to track everyone down because cell phones were very spotty at that point. The Towers hadn’t come down yet, but it was still difficult to really get in touch with anybody. We were still there.

I talked to the Congressman again, and him and his wife had gotten to the train station and gotten on a train to head north. We weren’t sure what was going to happen, but off he went, and hopefully get back to New York as quickly as he could. At that point, obviously—I don’t remember exactly when—but the Pentagon got hit, and the alarms were going off in the Capitol and in the various office buildings. Most of the staff decided it was time to go and to head home. I stayed in the office, again, trying to get the Congressman back to New York, trying to follow up and see what was happening [and to] get him some information on what was happening on the ground. I figured I’d be fine in the House office building. I figured if anything happens, it’s going to happen to the Capitol, unfortunately. Then, at one point, I felt a giant rumble come over the building, at which point I decided, well, maybe I should get going. Turns out it was a helicopter—some type of military helicopter that was flying.

Also, at that point, a Capitol Hill police officer had come to the door and knocked on the door and said, “Time to go.” So I left the office. I was the last
one out of the office. Locked up and went downstairs to our counsel on the Judiciary Committee’s office because I knew he was probably going to be down there because of just the kind of guy he was. He also had a lot of family back in Brooklyn, knew a lot of folks in New York. I figured he was probably doing the same thing I was. So I went downstairs, and he was in his office. I told him, “David, it’s time to go.” He packed up as well, and we headed out together. I actually went and decided to take the Metro because I heard it was still running. I went down, got on the Metro, and the Metro was actually running fairly well, the underground portions anyway. Because I lived in DC at the time, so I was only about eight or nine stops from the Capitol. Took the Metro home and got back to my apartment in Dupont Circle. Turned on the TV right away. Again, was trying to get a hold of the Congressman. I knew he had basically made it to Philadelphia, where the train that he was on stopped. He was looking for another train to get onto. He then made his way on another train that went to Newark. In Newark, he found basically the one Amtrak train that was going to go into the city, or they were allowing back into the city, and got him and his wife on the train to be able to get back and get to their apartment and check on their son, who was fine. They live on the Upper West Side.

JOHNSON: How were you able to stay in touch with him at this point?

HEIMOV: It was just dialing and dialing and dialing, trying to get through on the cell phone. I think, at one point, he actually found a payphone and called my house because he knew we weren’t in the office. I talked to him at that point. Once he got on the train into New York, most communication by that point had been cut off, by cell phone anyway, and even a lot of the land lines. I was then talking to one or two of the staff members up in New York. We were missing one of our staff members early on in the day. She was working down
at the World Trade Center area, at one of the polling places down there. She ended up being fine. We found her a few hours later, but, obviously, a tense situation for us. Obviously, a lot more difficult for a lot of other people. Basically, [we were] trying to work from home at that point and trying to just track what we could, talk to the Congressman, talk to staff, try to figure out where people should be, what we could do to help. Obviously, most of it was up to the fire and police. There wasn’t really a lot for us to do at that point, being staff. It was more of a kind of see what was happening and keeping an eye on things and where we could go to be helpful.

JOHNSON: I wanted to go back for a minute to the evacuation—two questions. Was there any kind of audible alarm that you heard, telling people to evacuate?

HEIMOV: Yes. I believe they came over the beeper system and told everyone they should leave the building and evacuate.

JOHNSON: What memories do you have of the evacuation once you left the building?

HEIMOV: Again, I was probably one of the last ones out. Most people had left the building already. Just, given it was our district, and I felt a certain sense of trying to see what was happening and get information. So it was actually pretty quiet by the time I got out of the building. It actually felt a little eerie in that there weren’t a lot of people left. When you got outside, there were police sirens all over the place. Capitol Police were running around, doing different things, but there weren’t a lot of people themselves left on the Hill, going to the Metro.

JOHNSON: You worked for Congressman Nadler in 1993. This was the year of the bombing in the World Trade Center. When you heard that the first plane had hit the Tower, did you have any memories of this or think that something could be happening again?
HEIMOV: Yes, you had to think back to that, obviously, with the first bombing. It crossed my mind. Most of what we were hearing was it was a Cessna at first. It wasn’t a big jetliner. So you figured, well, maybe it was a terrorist, but you weren’t sure. You really didn’t know. It was obviously odd that a plane would hit the World Trade Center. You’d think that they could avoid it somehow, but planes unfortunately lose control and things like that. So it definitely crossed my mind, but without being sure. You obviously don’t want to be too alarmist at that point.

JOHNSON: Did your office have any kind of emergency evacuation plan before 9/11?

HEIMOV: No. I don’t think anyone really thought about it. I’m sure we were supposed to, but we didn’t. Nobody paid attention to it.

JOHNSON: As events were unfolding, how were you able to stay in touch with other staff members? Because at this point, you didn’t have Blackberrys.

HEIMOV: Yes, most of it once I got home, it was calling on landlines. The phones seemed to be working okay that way, in DC anyway. You couldn’t get through to anybody in New York, but in DC, talking to DC staff, you could get folks on the landlines in their homes.

JOHNSON: What was going on in the New York district office?

HEIMOV: Again, there was only one or two people in the office itself that day because of being primary day. But they were evacuated pretty quickly because Congressman Nadler’s district office is only about 15 blocks from the World Trade Center. So they were pretty quickly out of the office and back to their respective homes as well.
JOHNSON: On 9/11, you talked a little bit about some of the work that you were going to do and how you were trying to help out. As the weeks progressed, what did your office do specifically to try to help your constituents?

HEIMOV: A couple of main things. One was trying to get information to folks on what kind of resources were available to people who could no longer live down in Lower Manhattan, who had been evacuated and taken out of the Ground Zero zone around there. It was about a 20- to 25-block radius. A lot of it was collecting information about FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency], about shelters, about where people could go. And there was no school—if they could find daycare and things like that. One of the big things we did is that there were a certain population in Lower Manhattan of elderly folks who couldn’t leave their apartments on 9/11. Electricity was out, obviously. The elevators were not working. These are people on upper floors who could not walk down the stairs. There was a certain number of people who just couldn’t get out, no matter what they tried. Our office organized a lot of local elected officials, Red Cross, and other organizations to basically find these people in their buildings, to be able to bring them medications, food, help some folks get out if they could, if they needed to. That’s one of the bigger things that we did.

JOHNSON: How long did this last for you?

HEIMOV: Well, you could say it’s still going on today. The initial response, probably six to eight weeks, in tracking those folks and making sure that they were okay and making sure they were getting what they needed to just survive on a daily basis. It was extra difficult because our district office, being in the evacuation zone—we actually didn’t have a district office for several weeks. People were working out of an apartment on the Upper West Side of one of our other staffers. It made it a little extra difficult in that we were routing all the calls
for our office to DC, and then we were having to pass information along to
the New York folks, who needed to then go out in the field and connect with
people and do things, to make plans and organize.

JOHNSON: So because of the circumstances, the DC office had to take the lead with any
kind of casework that you did and outreach?

HEIMOV: Oh yes, everything had to be routed through us.

JOHNSON: Did you have any kind of events that you had set up for constituency there to
let them voice their concerns or other kinds of events that you organized in
your office?

HEIMOV: Down the road we did. I would say not immediately. Not even in the first
couple months. The first couple months was all really recovery from the attack and
trying to just make sure people’s lives could, at some point, get back to as
normal as possible. A lot of it was dealing with the business community also
in Lower Manhattan, who obviously was affected. They weren’t working
anymore, and the businesses were closed, even if they weren’t in the World
Trade Center, even directly across the street or anything like that. It was that,
again, 20-, 25-block radius, where it was just shut down. There were a lot of
people wondering, how am I supposed to make a living and make the money
I need to make to survive and feed my family and things like that. It was
working with FEMA and our local constituency to deal with those situations.

JOHNSON: You mentioned that once Representative Nadler knew what was going on, he
decided to return to his district. How long did he stay there, and what kinds
of things did he do while he was up in New York?

HEIMOV: I think he was there, probably, the first two weeks. I don’t think he came
back before then. While he was up there, he was basically attending a lot of
the mayor’s [Rudy Giuliani] taskforce briefings about what was happening. He was basically trying to act as a conduit to the federal government, to say, “What do you need from the federal government?” Obviously, as everyone knows, Mayor Giuliani was running the site and was running the rescue operation. He was really just trying to be a go-between to make sure what the city needed was being provided by the federal government.

**JOHNSON:** What about personal connections that he might have made? Did he try to reach out to families of victims that were from your district?

**HEIMOV:** Oh yes, as time went by, he attended some funerals of some folks. Unfortunately, he had some personal friends who died in the World Trade Center. He was doing home visits of folks, attending vigils, along with a lot of other folks. This was obviously very personal for him, being his district and living in the city for most of his life. Being an elected official from that area for, at that point, almost 25 years—I believe it was 22 years, right in that area. This is extremely personal for him. He had been in the World Trade Center numerous times. I think he’d been there the week before, at Windows on the World [venue on the top floors of the North Tower], attending an event.

**JOHNSON:** How did you and the staff—how did you handle your personal loss, and maybe any anxiety that you might have had, versus what you had to do as a staff member to support your constituents?

**HEIMOV:** I think most of us were constantly working, so we weren’t really thinking about the personal side of things. Nobody in our office, fortunately, lost an immediate family member. I had friends on the Hill who did lose immediate family members. For us, it was more just trying to be as supportive as we could of the people back in New York and trying to be as helpful as we could
for as long as we could. We thought about going up to New York, but we decided it was better off just to stay in DC, especially not having a district office, to man the phones and do the work that needed to be done.

Eventually, we did take the entire staff up to Ground Zero a few weeks later to tour the site, so we could really get that firsthand perspective of what had happened and really understand—which was obviously very devastating.

JOHNSON: Was that your first time back to New York after 9/11?

HEIMOV: Yes, yes. The entire staff went together.

JOHNSON: What are your recollections, your personal recollections, of the Congressman during this amazing period of tragedy and crisis? How did he respond?

HEIMOV: I think he responded well. It was obviously, like I said, very personal for him. He was incredibly upset, sad. A lot of it was him just trying to understand how he could be helpful because, obviously, he’s not a first responder, but he was somebody who wanted to make sure that the resources were available to everyone who needed what they needed to do the rescue and recovery and clean up and things like that and work with constituents. Making sure the people who lived in that area were taken care of. Congressman Nadler is not the kind of guy—he’s very smart. He doesn’t show a lot of emotion generally. He likes to keep his eye on the ball. Likes to keep working straight through.

Having worked for him at that point for almost 10 years, you could tell, especially when I saw him again, that he was deeply affected. He wasn’t as happy as he had been in the past. He was much more introspective in talking about things. You could see how sad he was about what had happened. He said many times, “I can’t believe this happened to my city.” He’s someone who took the train a lot back to New York City as well. He was talking about the first time he went back to New York City on the train, and the Towers
weren’t there. He said that moment was almost like reliving the entire thing, and it really hit home. When you go into New York City, if you’re on Amtrak, one of the first things you see is the World Trade Center, the two Towers rising above. They weren’t there anymore. It’s the type of thing where a lot of people in New York hated the World Trade Center and the Towers. They thought they were too big and they were ugly. Obviously, after September 11, everyone misses them now and wishes that they could complain about them continually.

**JOHNSON:** Congress is back in session, the House is back in session, on September 12. What was it like for you and other people in your office, coming back to the Capitol, knowing that it very likely could have been a target?

**HEIMOV:** I’m not sure we really thought about it. We discussed it a little bit, but, again, because of our district being directly affected and being the target, I think we were just focusing on that so much. We didn’t really think about “We could have been attacked.” A lot of other offices, while they were obviously concerned and reaching out, we had work to do. We had people to respond to. We had information to get out. We had to reach out to agencies, things like that. With the Congressman not being in DC, a couple of us were called upon to brief other Members of Congress about what was happening back in the city from what we heard from the mayor’s office and from the federal government, other federal offices, FBI, people like that. We thought about it a little bit, but not for very long. We didn’t have time to sit around and really contemplate it. It was just, all right, we need to get working, so we can make sure people in New York are doing the best they can.

**JOHNSON:** Did the Speaker at the time, Speaker [John Dennis] Hastert, and House Leadership look to your office for more information about what was going on
or for you to take the lead because of the fact you were so directly impacted by this event?

HEIMOV:

Yes, we were definitely talking on a daily basis in Speaker Hastert’s Office. The leadership was very good, calling us and saying, “Whatever you guys need, let us know.” This is obviously a national attack as well. While New York for us was very personal, it was still a national attack. I think the Speaker’s Office was still looking at this as a national perspective, national security, and things like that. So they did look to us for some information, but I think the Speaker’s Office was probably getting pretty good briefings as well as to what was happening at the time.

JOHNSON:

You mentioned just a minute ago that you had to do some briefings, or your office had to do briefings. Do you have an example of that?

HEIMOV:

They did a Member-wide briefing in the Capitol for what was happening. Since Congressman Nadler wasn’t there, I went and basically briefed whatever Members of Congress were in DC at the time as to what we knew was happening, what casualties we knew about, what the situation was, whether they thought they would be finding survivors, as best we could, as to what we thought was coming down the road, and what it is that we thought might be needed in New York at the time.

JOHNSON:

So this was in the days following 9/11?

HEIMOV:

Yes.

JOHNSON:

You mentioned that the Speaker’s Office asked if there was anything they could do to help you. Were there also other House offices that reached out to your office in particular, to see if they could help?
HEIMOV: Oh, yes. We got a call from a lot of offices. I remember, in particular, the folks who represent Oklahoma City [Julius Caesar (J. C.) Watts, Jr.] called to offer whatever advice they could, to what we could do, obviously, since they had suffered a terrorist attack as well. We heard from several offices and leadership on both sides. The Secretary of Commerce at the time called the Congressman to say he was going to be the point of contact for the administration, to say what your office needs, let us know how we can be helpful. There was definitely an outpouring of support from everywhere.

JOHNSON: What about with the New York delegation? Did you work closely together in the days and weeks following?

HEIMOV: Oh yes, statewide. We all came together very quickly. We held regular meetings at least once, if not twice, three times a week, of the staff, and particularly in the beginning. It was an overwhelming amount of work. We were doing what we could for our constituents, but there were obviously transportation issues to deal with, there were energy issues, there were communication issues. So the delegation met, and we divvied up responsibility, mostly by what committee Members sat on, to decide who would handle what agency, who would talk about rebuilding efforts as the weeks went on, dealing with those agencies and what support those agencies could provide to New York City.

JOHNSON: What are your memories of the atmosphere that was in the House in the days and the weeks following? What kind of sense did you get?

HEIMOV: The days following, I think there was a lot of anger and sadness at the same time. I think you felt a lot of resolve, though, come in the weeks following, of people obviously coming together. The country had been attacked. People just deciding we were all united, as we often talk about. It was what can we
do to help each other, what can we do to make sure that New York rebuilds, and also the Pentagon and Pennsylvania as well. It was just a real sense of unity. There wasn’t the bickering that goes on around here, unfortunately, a lot in politics. It was just all hands on deck. What can we do to help? Let’s pull together and move on, get this going.

JOHNSON: Do you have any specific memories of the joint session that was on September 20, in which President [George W.] Bush came to speak to Congress?

HEIMOV: Sure. Obviously, we were there, and we watched it very closely, to listen to what he was saying, what he could do for the recovery. It was a very, again, unifying speech, I think. It was helping the country come together again, heal, move on—things like that.

JOHNSON: Did you attend any of the tributes or ceremonies that took place afterwards? Specifically, there was one for staff members that was outside on the reflecting pool by the Capitol. Did you attend that?

HEIMOV: I didn’t, no.

JOHNSON: Did you attend any others that were either in DC or New York City?

HEIMOV: Yes, there were some events on the Capitol steps as the weeks went by. I attended a couple of those vigils. In New York, several months later, I attended a ceremony up there in remembrance of 9/11 victims.

JOHNSON: At the time, across the country and among the Capitol community, there were a lot of commemorative ribbons and people wanting flags. Was this something that your office either participated in or did you get a lot of
requests, based on the fact that this was something that happened in your district?

HEIMOV: Yes, mostly we got donations. We got a lot of people from other Member’s offices coming to us, calling us, saying, “This school group in our district collected $500. They want to give to a firehouse in New York City.” “We have this town that has an extra fire truck. How do we get in touch with somebody in New York City to donate a fire truck to the folks up there?” It wasn’t so much asking us for things. It was really offering us things from around the country. Even internationally, there were gifts coming in. We got things mailed to our office, just donations, to go to victims and first responders and things like that.

JOHNSON: I can imagine that your office received a lot of press inquiries based on what had happened. How did you handle those, and what were some of the typical questions that were asked?

HEIMOV: In the beginning, it was mostly just our press secretary, myself, and a couple of other folks answering the press’ questions about what was going on because the Congressman was running around New York City. He wasn’t really interested in getting on TV and doing press. He was more interested in finding out what we could do to help and being useful. While being on TV can be important to keep the country aware of what’s happening, for him, he wanted to be on the ground. In Manhattan itself, it was rather restrictive movement in the beginning. Even if we wanted to get a camera to him, it was difficult to find a way to do that. As time went by, he did a lot of TV shows, obviously, a lot of press, talking about his personal experiences on that day, and talking about what he was doing to help the recovery, and talking about personal feelings he had and messages he had received from folks and talking to constituents, and things like that.
JOHNSON: Do you feel that 9/11 and the aftermath of 9/11 changed your day-to-day responsibilities as an administrative assistant for the Congressman?

HEIMOV: Yes, it definitely did. Long-term, obviously, they always subside. Things get easier. As an administrative assistant, you’re there to make sure the Congressman is running on time, make sure he’s getting the information that’s needed, make sure the staff is working properly. It became much more—it’s going to sound silly—much more constituent-oriented. You’re always providing constituent service, but the job of a Congressman is to be legislating in Washington, going to committee meetings, and things like that. For us, it was much more personal involvement. We weren’t really worried about committee meetings. We weren’t worried about what legislation was being passed as much. It was more personal service, and all hands on deck of how do we get this constituent a place to stay? How do we get this constituent the FEMA check that they need because FEMA can’t find them because they’re obviously not in their home? They may be in a shelter or at a friend’s house or something like that. We were all caseworkers at that point, whereas as administrative assistant, previously, it was much more political, much more policy-oriented and day-to-day operations. We all became caseworkers to people in New York.

JOHNSON: Just to switch gears here a little bit, what changes did you notice in security after the attacks?

HEIMOV: Yes, that was pretty drastic. Previously, you could drive right up to the House office buildings. It wasn’t a problem. You didn’t have to show ID if you were driving in until you got into the garage itself. Then, after 9/11, and up to this day, the entire Capitol complex is blocked off. You have to show ID if you’re driving in, if you’re a staffer, on the street, further away from the buildings. You have the concrete barriers everywhere now. Not as much easy access.
One of the bigger changes is you now see police officers with very big guns, as opposed to pre-9/11, police officers had their handguns, and, once in a while, you’d see someone with a shotgun or something like that. But now, seeing an M16 over a police officer’s shoulder is normal, and other various types of weapons that they use. That’s probably the biggest difference. You feel much more militarized now than previous 9/11.

JOHNSON: Did the increased security serve as a hindrance in any way to your responsibilities?

HEIMOV: No, I don’t think so. This place caters to Members of Congress, obviously. I think we were able to move pretty freely, being staff. I think people, outside of being staff, people who were normally coming to Capitol Hill, it definitely hindered them because the access was more limited. It was harder to get into the buildings. They cut off access to the Capitol unless you had a specific appointment or being escorted by a Member of Congress or staffer, whereas previously anybody could just walk into the Capitol from the underground tunnels from the House and Senate Office Buildings. But I think, as staff, it didn’t really affect us, no.

JOHNSON: What kind of emergency preparedness training did you receive after 9/11?

HEIMOV: After that, the Sergeant at Arms Office was obviously very diligent at making sure that every office knew what to keep in the office. They called it a go bag. To make sure there’s a bag filled with some drinks, some food, things like that, in case we were sheltered in place, as they say, in the office. They also did a lot more emergency drills after that, where we had to evacuate the building. We had to make sure we had a rally point for our staff if we got separated, to make sure we could find everybody when they got there. Over time, obviously, with the anthrax as well, everyone had the gas masks put
into their office, the hoods, things like that. It became much more like elementary school when you have the fire drills every so often. They happened a lot more frequently. The Sergeant at Arms Office was much more diligent about making sure we knew what we were doing and making sure we were doing it properly.

**JOHNSON:** On September 6, 2002, there was a commemorative Joint Meeting that was held in Federal Hall in New York City. How involved was your office in the planning for this event?

**HEIMOV:** We were very involved with it, helping to pick the location, making sure there was an appropriate place, working with the mayor’s office, obviously, to make sure Members of Congress could get to New York. Working with the Speaker’s Office to make sure Members could transport properly, things like that. Working to make sure Congressman Nadler had his appropriate role in the ceremony, along with other Members of New York delegation—the Speaker and other folks.

**JOHNSON:** What did he do for the ceremony?

**HEIMOV:** He was one of the folks who escorted the Speaker into the building, and I believe up to the podium. Part of the welcoming committee, I guess you’d call it.

**JOHNSON:** Do you have any lasting memories of that event?

**HEIMOV:** I would say just everyone being there in New York—getting the entire Congress in one place, at one time, except in DC. So it was pretty amazing to see everyone there and really participating. You didn’t have every Member of Congress, but you had the vast majority were there.
JOHNSON: Before ending today, I wanted to ask a few questions about the anthrax scares that took place about a month later. From what you recall, how did your office stay abreast of the new developments in this—everything was happening so quickly. What information was sent to you and where did it come from?

HEIMOV: I think most of it was word of mouth. I don’t really remember. There were a couple of briefings, but it was moving so quickly, and the buildings were shut down pretty quickly. I don’t think there was any kind of group meeting ahead of time. Most of it was post the attack. We were also moved from the House office buildings to offices of the GAO [Government Accountability Office]. Those were supposed to act as our district offices, but, unfortunately, there was no cell service there. There were no phone lines. There was no place to hook up a computer. Most offices that I know of, we all just ended up working out of our houses again for several days until they got the Capitol complex cleared. Again, we were working off cell phones and off landlines and calling into the Sergeant at Arms and people like that just to get information as to what we should be doing.

JOHNSON: Because of the 9/11 attacks, and now with anthrax, how closely did your office work with the Capitol Police and the Sergeant at Arms Office?

HEIMOV: I’d say as close as anybody. Obviously, with the anthrax, it wasn’t just our office. It was the entire Congress. Probably not any more closely than anybody else, I would say, in that situation. It was just a typical back and forth; this is what you should be doing. I think our district office may have been a little more careful than a lot of other district offices in that they didn’t open anything in the district office. It was all mailed to DC to be examined by Capitol Police and then mailed back to the district office to make sure everything was clear and everything was OK.
JOHNSON: On the heels of 9/11, having to evacuate the Capitol, and now you have the anthrax attacks, what kind of effect did this have on the morale of staff?

HEIMOV: It was tough. People were scared. Opening the mail now was suddenly a dangerous activity, even though it was scanned by the Capitol Police, and they tried to kill the chemicals before they came in if there was anything. It was still nerve-wracking because you don’t know what’s coming in. You don’t know what people are mailing to you. We did have a situation about a year after 9/11 where somebody mailed us something. It had wires on it, and it had a clock on it, and we got very scared. We called the Capitol Police. We evacuated our office. They brought in the bomb dogs and the bomb experts and things like that. It ended up being just somebody sent a clipboard with a clock. It was some kind of gadget they came up with to say, “Hey, you should do this.” In the olden days, maybe look at it and go, “Oh, that’s nice.” But, obviously, at this point, when you see anything like that, you get very skittish and very concerned. You take the extra precaution.

JOHNSON: Did you ever have any thoughts of leaving the Capitol, either after 9/11 or the anthrax scares, just thinking it was too dangerous?

HEIMOV: I think it crosses everyone’s mind, but, actually, one of the partners in the office I’m in now, the lobbying firm I’m in, was in our waiting room on 9/11 to talk to me about possibly leaving Capitol Hill to go work in the private sector. I had been there already about nine years or almost 10 years. I obviously didn’t have the meeting that morning. When I talked to him later, I said, “Well, I’m not comfortable leaving now.” I actually wanted to stay and help with the recovery and do what I could to help New York City and the constituents and DC and the Pentagon and folks. So I ended up staying on Capitol Hill another four years after that and then ended up actually going to work with this gentleman eventually, where I am now.
JOHNSON: From what you remember, were there any major changes that took place for your office policies or procedures as a result of anthrax scare?

HEIMOV: Yes, the opening of the mail. As simple as it sounds, anything that looked tampered with, anything that looked remotely suspicious, was sent to the Capitol Police. Like I said, the district office, they didn’t open a stitch of mail up there. They mailed everything to Washington, no matter what it was. I don’t think every district office did that. I think they just kind of went about business as usual. It became more of an adventure to try and get our constituent mail. We encouraged people to use email more. We wanted to get as little paper as possible at that point.

JOHNSON: Understandably, there was lots of attention that was paid to your constituents, but what about your staff, about how they were handling everything? Was there anything available to them or anything that the Congressman might have done to help people during this time?

HEIMOV: The Congress did offer counselors to folks who wanted to talk about it and discuss their feelings about the situation and what had happened on that day. I don’t know if any of our staff took advantage of it. Obviously, that was confidential. But I know it was offered by the [Attending] Physician’s Office of the Capitol.

JOHNSON: Was there anything that you were able to do, or something in your office, to improve morale, just to make sure that everyone was still doing okay?

HEIMOV: Yes, we checked in with folks and made sure they were aware of the counseling that was available. But again, for us, it was just several months of nonstop work. We were taking turns and shifts on weekends to make sure somebody was available to take a phone call. Again, not having a district office, just to make sure if somebody in New York needed somebody or
needed something, there was somebody on the line, not just an answering machine or anything like that. I think, for us, it was much more—you get that work, work, work, just keep on working on it, and then a couple months later, kind of more settles in. You kind of suddenly realized what had happened. It becomes much more personal at that point because things slow down, and you can focus more on what actually happened.

**JOHNSON:** What are your lasting memories of September 11 and, in particular, if there’s one visual that you think would really stick in your mind, no matter how much time passes, what would that be?

**HEIMOV:** I would say the Towers coming down is always going to be the big one for me. Like I said before, the Twin Towers were a landmark in New York City. Something obviously, easily identifiable. To see those large structures coming down to the ground like that, so quickly—you’re never going to get away from that. I’d say the other one is, when I got home, my wife yelling at me because I didn’t come home sooner and evacuate sooner, and her being at the apartment by herself without me.

**JOHNSON:** Looking back, is there anything that, if you had the chance to change, that either you could do differently with the response in your office in particular or with the House in general?

**HEIMOV:** That’s a hard question to answer because it’s such a big project and such a big situation. I don’t think anyone could do it perfectly. I think if I were to change anything, better communication would be available for folks to be able to reach each other and do what they need to do. I think the first responders, it was mainly on them to do what they needed to do, to get it done, to take care of the folks that were on the ground. I think Congress did what it had to do to make sure the country felt safe, to make sure the country
was unified and that we were okay, we weren’t going to be under constant attack. I think, given the situation, we really did what we could. I think we’d probably do just about the same thing over again.

JOHNSON: One last question. It’s been almost 10 years since September 11, the attacks. With nearly a decade to reflect on this, do you feel any differently now than you did immediately after the attacks? Do you have a different kind of perspective?

HEIMOV: Yes, I think the perspective is much more guarded. Be on guard. Understand that this is not a safe world. I think right after the attacks, it was a lot of anger, a lot of being upset at being attacked and trying to understand why we were attacked. I think now you understand why. Obviously, you don’t agree with it. In looking back, it’s just being on guard more. Understanding that, as they say, freedom is not free. Understanding that there’s a price to be paid, unfortunately, sometimes, by people who don’t like other countries having their freedom. I think it’s understanding the world better than back then.