“I remember just in terms of the constituent feedback—the phone lines we had turned on when we left the offices in case anybody called, and I seem to recall there was one recording from a constituent, it was a man, sounded like an older gentleman who had called, and he lived in the Pentagon City area, or Crystal City area, and he was registering a complaint about a low-flying plane that was flying near his building. It was just a powerful sign that moments later, it was apparent what was really going on. But at the time people were going about their daily lives, and so we kind of got a smattering of different feedback from people, and really we were in reaction mode.”

Melissa Koloszar

June 16, 2011
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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 and the “People Search” section of the History, Art & Archives website, 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

Albin J. Kowalewski is a Senior Historical Editor with the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives.
—MELISSA KOLOSZAR—
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

KOWALEWSKI: Well, this is Abbie Kowalewski from the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives, and today’s date is June 16th, 2011, and I am here in the House Recording Studio with Ms. Melissa Koloszar. Ms. Koloszar was the legislative director for Representative Jim [James P.] Moran in 2001, so thank you for joining us today.

KOLOSZAR: You’re most welcome.

KOWALEWSKI: I’d like to begin with a pretty basic question, just where you were on the morning of September 11th, and what you were doing.

KOLOSZAR: Okay. As you mentioned, I worked for Congressman Moran, and he is a member of the Defense Appropriation Subcommittee, and that morning we were planning to mark up that fiscal year’s defense appropriation’s bill. I had been in the office early that day and had been getting ready to go over to the Capitol to do a review. They typically let the staff of the Members’ offices review a draft of the bill, which is what we were doing that day. Since I handled those issues for the Congressman, that was where I was heading.

So I had been in the office when the initial news came about the plane, the first plane hitting the World Trade Center Tower. At that point, I didn’t really know, like most people just thought it was either a commuter plane or just some kind of commercial accident and headed to the Capitol where we had all gathered to review the bill. As the news unfolded, it became apparent it was a lot more serious. At that point I don’t think we realized the gravity of what had happened, so it was only as time unfolded that it really, not only became apparent that you know the second Tower had been hit, but then I
can’t remember the exact time they started covering on the news that the Pentagon had also been hit.

So it was really apparent at that point that the markup wasn’t going to be proceeding. The Members were gathered separately, so we had no contact with the Members at the time, but they were in an adjoining room going through preparation of the bill. So it was at that point that we had really been told that they were going to have to evacuate the building. We had been instructed to leave the Capitol campus and go out on the lawn. It was pretty frenzied at that point in time, no procedures for evacuations. We had all run out of the building, and the strange thing at the time was that all the other buildings on the House side seemed to still be occupied. So at that point, we—without any guidance from Capitol Police or others—went back into our office building since all our belongings were there. I went back to my office just to touch base with the other staff that had still been there. A lot of people had been in the process of departing at that point.

So do you want me to proceed onward, or do you want to ask a few other questions?

KOWALEWSKI: Oh, I’m curious to know who told you to leave.

KOLOSZAR: To leave our personal offices?

KOWALEWSKI: The Capitol.

KOLOSZAR: Oh, the Capitol. Somebody came in, I can’t remember at the time. I assumed it was instructions from the Capitol Police. Because at that point I think they were worried that the Capitol building was a target, so there was concern about vulnerability, so everybody was told to leave. I assume the whole Capitol complex had been evacuated, but I don’t know. I know there was a
mass of people leaving the building at the time, but I just don’t know. It was pretty hectic, and there was just piecemeal information coming through, so we were just doing as we were instructed, leaving the building. We were with the predominant committee staff that were familiar with the Pentagon and Pentagon issues, and so it was really pretty shocking news to find out when the Pentagon had been hit and procedures. But there was just so little information and communication about what was going on. But I think people understood the gravity of the situation, so it was my understanding at the time that it was the Capitol Police that had instructed us to evacuate the building.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Okay. Were you in contact with Congressman Moran at all during this period?

**KOLOSZAR:** You know, when we were told to leave, the Members were, I think, already being escorted elsewhere. Since there were separate protocols for the Members and how they would be treated in an evacuation effort I never had any contact with him at the time. We were just told that the Members were evacuated separately, so I don’t know whether they were all together still at that point. They clearly were taken out of the building separately, and then when I went back to the office, it was the chief of staff and maybe one or two other people still left in the office, and he was just trying to get a head count of where everybody was. He had sent a number of people home. If you think back at that time, and I don’t know whether you worked on the Hill at that point, there was no protocol for an emergency of this magnitude, and there were no lockdowns. There were no limitations on leaving from the parking garages, so I ultimately was told to leave by our chief of staff. I certainly didn’t know any other way to go, but I went into the garage and got my car and left.
It’s really strange now when you think about how different the protocols are because you would never be able to do that if there were a similar type of event at this point. The whole protocol would be a lot more structured, and at this time I think they were just trying to ensure that the Capitol complex and adjoining buildings were sufficiently evacuated. There was really no process for that.

Every office was kind of on its own on how to ensure that their staff were released. So we tried to stay in touch by cell phone communications, which worked for a while. But that day, cell phone reception went down fairly soon after the news came out of what was going on. I think the lines had just been inundated with people, so I was fortunate that I was able to avoid a lot of the traffic problems that a lot of people encountered. I ran into a friend who ironically worked on the Appropriations Committee, and he had just said he had heard on the news that the 395 tunnel to exit going into Northern Virginia had been either blocked or there was a backup, so I took an alternative route, and was able to get out that way.

But it was a really strange, surreal day. I drove by the Pentagon, I lived in Arlington, not far from the Pentagon at the time, and it just was an image that sears into your mind because never would you imagine something like that happening. Seeing the Pentagon burning, and having really very little traffic at the time, which I was sort of surprised by, I think that certainly changed as the hours went by. But a lot of uncertainty all the way around. I just don’t think anybody was able to comprehend or digest what was happening at the time.

KOWALEWSKI: So what were your main priorities for the rest of the day after you left?
KOLOSZAR: Well, I stayed in cell phone communication and landline communication with our chief of staff. We were trying to glean whatever information we could because the Members were still being asked by the media to comment on the situation. We were trying to ascertain details about not only on a macro level what was happening but just from a constituent standpoint. Since the Pentagon is in Mr. Moran’s district, many of the people living and working in the area were affected by this. So it really was a job that continued even though we were not in the offices, both that day and the days following. We had received a lot of phone calls, tried to facilitate whatever information we could, people that you know called to either help, offer to help in whatever manner they could, or needed help. There really was no set structure for how these kinds of things you know are addressed in this kind of emergency, so a lot of things sort of screeched to a halt on a federal level. Mr. Moran has a high concentration of federal employees that live in his district and work in his district as well as contract personnel that work at federal buildings, and so that was certainly impacted. And the airport, National Airport, is in his district, that was closed, so there was a tremendous, not only financial impact but certainly personal and just any kind of safety aspect that you could imagine. People were worried, was there going to be another strike, or where was this coming from? So a lot of this really was just the beginning.

That day was a terrible day, but what unfolded subsequently, a lot of anxiety, a lot of uncertainty on how to proceed, and how to keep people calm. I think that was something in tribute to Mr. Moran, he understood the gravity of his role, and that of his fellow Members, that they needed to not only address constituent-related issues, but really figure out how to maintain some level of order and stability because the whole country really was looking to the Congress to act on what was happening and be able to address it. That was
very trying, so throughout that day I know Mr. Moran was trying to glean what information he could about what was happening. A lot of misinformation was circulating throughout the media, too, and that sort of only heightened anxiety. You got a lot of piecemeal information as well as information—some of it accurate, some of it not so accurate.

KOWALEWSKI: Well, that’s an interesting point; rumor is a very potent force in a situation like that.

KOLOSZAR: Yes, I can remember there was a report that there was an explosion, I think at Foggy Bottom, near the State Department, and I don’t know whether there was something indeed that happened, but I know Mr. Moran at the time had been told that there was another attack. That kind of information is really very difficult for public officials to try to sort through and make sense of. There’s that balance of trying to provide information and formulate a response as well as how much can you verify it in an environment where very little lines of communication were open. You couldn’t just call the federal office buildings and officials and get the information you were looking for.

KOWALEWSKI: Well, you brought up an interesting point as well just a few minutes back about—people were looking to the Congress for a sense of reassurance, for a sense of support, and my next question has to deal with the gathering on the East Front of the Capitol later that night, when many of the Members came back. Did you watch that at all? Were you privy to that event?

KOLOSZAR: I was not there, but I did watch. I watched it like a lot of people from a TV standpoint, just to see the vigil and really see how the Members came together. So I do remember all of that and sort of the lead-up to it. It was pretty powerful, and in an environment where you’re used to the back and forth of partisan debates, it was a powerful sign to see all these Members
gathered together and really showing a sign of unity as a country that the leadership was fully behind. The mourning that needed to happen, and the response, and any sort of policy that was going to have to be enacted quickly to address whatever reaction, and that was the difficult thing. How do you respond in that kind of environment as a Congress? And certainly the pressures on the White House at the time [to respond].

KOWALEWSKI: What was it like returning to work on the 12th?

KOLOSZAR: Oh, you know, really demoralizing. I think everybody just couldn’t believe what happened. I think really there was a state of shock throughout the country certainly. But in this area where all of these locations are in close proximity of your everyday life, it’s very trying. I know there was a lot of anxiety. We had some of the junior staff that were afraid to come back to work, and our chief of staff certainly wasn’t going to make them. They’re young—students and some interns that this is their first experience in the workforce. That’s a pretty sobering introduction to government and to the workforce.

So we had some junior staff that our chief of staff had said, “You don’t need to come back in just yet.” I remember just in terms of the constituent feedback—the phone lines we had turned on when we left the offices in case anybody called, and I seem to recall there was one recording from a constituent, it was a man, sounded like an older gentleman who had called, and he lived in the Pentagon City area, or Crystal City area, and he was registering a complaint about a low-flying plane that was flying near his building. It was just a powerful sign that moments later, it was apparent what was really going on. But at the time people were going about their daily lives, and so we kind of got a smattering of different feedback from people, and really we were in reaction mode.
Arlington County, Alexandria, Fairfax County emergency response teams were all heavily involved. In fact, Arlington County was the first to arrive at the Pentagon when it was hit. So we had a lot of rapid response within the emergency response communities in the Congressman’s district, and we were really trying to help them and facilitate whatever needs they had. That was something that Mr. Moran really took up. In conjunction with his fellow colleagues from northern Virginia, they really tried to push for whatever resources were needed from law enforcement, from fire departments and other personnel that were involved in the response. Because clearly local communities played as heavy of a role as federal officials did in how the aftermath was dealt with.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Yes, there aren’t too many places in the country I suppose where, you know, that were directly affected to this extent. New York of course, and then Pennsylvania, but Arlington and Alexandria especially, so I’m very curious to know what it was like working—representing an area that was directly affected by this that essentially shut down the National Airport for the next month, really.

**KOLOSZAR:** Right, right!

**KOWALEWSKI:** And what the main legislative concerns were, what the main legislative ambitions were.

**KOLOSZAR:** It was a whole array of issues that we were grappling with. I would say the closing of the airport, on a financial impact, was tremendous. It greatly affected not only commercial travel, but jobs. I can’t remember the financial amount that they were estimating a day that was being lost in economic loss to the region, but the hospitality industry was heavily impacted. Anybody working for the airline industry in this area—at the time, US Airways was
headquartered in that area, so I think that we just really had to grapple with what could we do to help and ensure that once there was a sense of security and safety surrounding the operation of the airport, that Mr. Moran’s push was to try to get that airport reopened. That was a long effort, and it was done in conjunction with his colleagues from the Virginia delegation, and really took a lot of effort. It was a balancing act of not trying to push too hard too soon because of security reasons—trying to ensure that there were appropriate measures taken to ensure that training was being done.

All of these things that we see every day now with airport screening, that all was new at the time. We had to really kind of balance what needed to be done on the security front and let federal officials drive that, and at the same time try to, from an economic standpoint, the Congressman and our office were really trying to help people that were dislocated from that, try to advocate to the best extent possible a reasonable timeline for getting the airport running again and getting the hotel, hospitality industry back up and running. So that was something that was really, I think, unique to this area that you didn’t necessarily see as much in other areas. You have so many federal facilities, the Pentagon, other sensitive facilities in this area that the flight path for National Airport was a real problem at the time, so that certainly had to be looked at and you really quickly saw that security interests really overtake any financial concerns in the immediate aftermath.

**KOWALEWSKI:** And that asks yet another interesting question about the relationship between offices from the state delegation. Did 9/11 change your personal relationship with other Members of the Virginia delegation? Your office’s relationship with other Members? Even Virginia Senators, as well?

**KOLOSZAR:** I don’t know whether it changed it, but it certainly strengthened it. We really worked very closely in a bipartisan, bicameral way with our fellow House
Member offices and Senate offices. We knew that if we did not work together on an agreed upon agenda that we would not be able to succeed in garnering additional resources and helping the region recover. That was something that the Members and the staff were all very united in. I think our delegation worked pretty well together anyways, but this certainly fostered it even more. And I think, too, there was a sense that while New York got a lion’s share of attention, as it should because of the gravity of, you know, the damage, and certainly the personal loss of life, that there was a concern that some attention might be lost in this area as efforts moved forward to come up with legislation to provide financial resources to these areas. So that was something the delegation worked very vigorously, not only just the Virginia delegation but Maryland and DC, we kind of all worked together, and to some extent even the Pennsylvania delegation.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Well, what about the Appropriations Committee? I know you worked closely with the staff there on the Defense Subcommittee. How did 9/11 change the way the Defense Subcommittee went about authorizing funds?

**KOLOSZAR:** Well, you saw the beginning of the series of supplemental appropriations bills that we’ve seen now for the past 10 years that have supported additional operations, not only for the military but for any of the other security-related needs that we’ve had to underwrite. It certainly created a workload that was very ongoing. The Appropriations Committee usually has a pretty set schedule and budget process with supplemental bills and ongoing needs that just kept them going around the clock. It really changed the dynamic of the annual appropriations process. I think that really created an increased workload and, also, trying to decipher how do you address a problem. You can’t just throw money at something and have that as the sole solution, so it’s a combination of not only funding and changing priorities but ensuring that
there is the follow through or the intended effect that you’re looking for. And that was a very trying thing.

I can only speak from my own perspective, but certainly the committee staff and the Members I think were troubled sometimes by the difficulty to effect change in a quick manner. You know Congress can enact legislation, but it takes a while for that to go into place. You had the creation of the Homeland Security Department after all of this, and you know that was an authorization effort. But it also took a lot of reorganization of the Appropriations Committee on the House and Senate side to sort of parallel the authorization changes because you had a whole new department created that was previously subdivided amongst other departments and agencies. So you kind of had the rewiring of the diagram, and it really impacted how funds were also channeled so they had the creation of the Homeland Security Appropriations Subcommittee. There was a lot of work in that manner—some challenges obviously of melding together a whole new department. You know any reorganization of an organization, private or public is a huge undertaking, and then when you look at having to do that with the kind of security concerns that were going on in the country at the time, I mean it’s amazing that they were able to accomplish that at all.

KOWALEWSKI: Did you find yourself working with—perhaps working more closely with committees that you only may have tangentially worked with before, namely Intelligence or Armed Services?

KOLOSZAR: Me personally? At the time, I think we worked pretty closely. The Congressman certainly was very steeped—he made a point to really become very versed on not only what the underlying reasons for what happened were, but just everybody became a lot more acutely aware of terrorism, and how do we, as a country that enjoys a lot of freedoms and public access, how do we
balance that? So I would say that there’s probably after that, a lot more emphasis and attention to those issues. Shifting of priorities, where for a good couple years it seemed like security legislation was a dominant part of the Congress, and so those issues naturally sort of surfaced more routinely than some of the domestic legislation. And not to dismiss or short-change those issues, it’s just my recollection was that you tended to have a lot more priority in the Congress at that time with dealing with the security-related things, both financial and national, and homeland security types of issues.

KOWALEWSKI: Well, this idea of public access certainly applies to the Capitol complex itself. What kind of short-term changes did you notice in the immediate aftermath, around the Capitol?

KOLOSZAR: Oh, it was a lot more serious of an environment. People were a little jittery. You kind of didn’t know whether there was going to be something happening next. It was certainly hard, I think, for a lot of families, especially staff that had young children or families that were concerned about could there be another strike, and safety about their family members going to work. People that had children in the daycares, I know there was concern about that around the Capitol complex. So things changed pretty dramatically on the security side.

But then on the workload side it takes a toll, and I think the New York delegation could certainly attest to this even more heavily, to field a lot of calls from people that had gone through very painful experiences in all of this and feel so helpless, too. I think we—through even a couple years time, you’re dealing with a lot of people that were directly impacted. Certainly, the weeks and months after 9/11 were the hardest ones on a constituent level, in dealing with people and trying to find ways to help them. Everything from those that were directly affected in some way on that day to those that were
financially impacted—feeling like you could only do so much. And that took a while, even for legislation for dislocated workers and that sort of response to materialize.

KOWALEWSKI: Okay, well, what about the long-term effects? A year removed?

KOLOSZAR: Yes, I no longer work up there now, but I do think that changed the environment. People are a lot more accustomed to having to have things screened. You know you can’t go anywhere without proper identification and a lot of limitations now in terms of access. There’s the side of, I think there’s a kind of loss of innocence, so to speak, that we saw after that, and it’s really unfortunate. I think we still have a lot of freedom, and people have plenty of access to their Congress and their Members, but it’s a lot more of a security process. I think you see a lot of frustration among the general public when they come. It’s a reminder. And I think that Congress has done as good a job as they can of balancing allowing people ready access with also trying to make sure that there’s proper security checks in place.

KOWALEWSKI: Yes, Congressman Moran said about a month later that everything is a new kind of normal after September 11th, and I thought that made sense.

KOLOSZAR: Yes it is, and that, I think that really captured what everybody was going through. You couldn’t think the way that you did before that or take for granted things that you did before. And you also had that whole process on the homeland security front that everybody’s grappling with, with the color-coding. People were frantically out buying duct tape and all kinds of supplies and mapping out their emergency evacuation routes. Those were all very real fears, and I suppose to some extent they are still today, but it’s the new normal now. So, at the time, it was all very new and hard for people to sort of adapt to that change in their environment and their daily habits. Now I think
we’ve gotten to the point where not to say we’re immune to that, but we’re just accustomed to it a lot more.

KOWALEWSKI: I have a few more questions, mainly about some of the legislation being proposed around that time, and, in particular, the quest to lure baseball back to Washington, DC. Were you at all privy to that process at all?

KOLOSZAR: I was there when that was debated. It was not an issue that I handled for the Congressman at the time. And it was certainly something that he was active in. There was a big push obviously to bring baseball back to the Washington area and clearly that succeeded in the long run. But there were a lot of hurdles along the way and security concerns were among the challenges that Members and other advocates had to deal with.

KOWALEWSKI: What about the memorial?

KOLOSZAR: The memorial was an interesting effort that unfolded, and that was something that I was involved with the Congressman. He felt very passionate about ensuring there was a memorial. One of the things we found after 9/11 is there was sort of a de-facto memorial that people started putting flowers and notes to loved ones, and just even people traveling in the area were leaving flowers and all kinds of things, flags at the foot of the hill, which is now where the Air Force Memorial is, by the Navy Annex, across from the Pentagon. That was sort of the site where you could oversee the Pentagon, and that was the site that Mr. Moran had initially advocated that they put the memorial. But there were plenty of other voices in the mix, particularly from the administration side. Even the Pentagon really didn’t want that as a site, and so he was involved in many discussions throughout the process of coming to an agreement on where to locate that. It ultimately landed where it is now, adjacent to the Pentagon, and I think he was satisfied in the end with
how things were done. But, for a number of months, we had advocated pretty strongly that there should be something where the original site was that people were memorializing victims. But time has a way of factoring in a lot of input and ideas, and not only from how do you memorialize that, but how do you also ensure that there’s public safety at a memorial dedicated to an incident that you don’t ever want to have happen again? So that was sort of one of the issues in the mix, is how do you ensure that people can come there to pay their respects, but it’s also right across from the Pentagon itself.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Well, one of the questions we like to ask our interviewees is to reflect back on 9/11, and was there anything that you would do differently in the aftermath of 9/11 at all?

**KOLOSZAR:** As a whole?

**KOWALEWSKI:** Yes.

**KOLOSZAR:** Oh my. Not sweat the small stuff, I guess. And I’m very thankful. We are lucky, those of us that worked on Capitol Hill at the time, that thanks to the courageous passengers on United Flight 93 there was no successful attempt for the plane to land or crash into the Capitol complexes. It does make you not only sad for family members who lost loved ones in the three planes, but also for your—I guess appreciation for life itself. I think that everybody has come out of that with a lot more of a sobering view of their own personal safety, and I think that’s something that I guess I don’t take for granted now when I’m in federal spaces. Or other spaces, you kind of have a sixth sense almost of paying attention to your security and your surroundings when you’re either traveling or in a federal building. I don’t know whether that’s something that other people have observed or commented on, but that’s something I guess I’ve taken away from that experience, having been up there
in the Capitol complexes. I think many of us felt that I guess you can’t change your day-to-day living, but having been there at the time, you realize that it’s something that you don’t want ever to see our country come back to a point where we can’t let basic freedoms be curbed too much. But at the same time, you recognize that there are needs for a security presence, and I think people that work up there still appreciate the work that the Capitol Police and others do on a day-to-day basis to protect that.

KOWALEWSKI: Well, if you don’t mind, do you have time to talk a little bit more about anthrax?

KOLOSZAR: Oh, sure.

KOWALEWSKI: Well, it seemed like just people were kind of becoming more comfortable back in the Capitol, then all of the sudden, anthrax hit.

KOLOSZAR: I know!

KOWALEWSKI: So like the first question about 9/11, I was hoping that you could provide a narrative of your day on October 15th, 2001.

KOLOSZAR: Oh gosh, I have a harder time remembering that specific day. Certainly, we had been alerted to the suspicious package or packages that people were concerned might be circulating, and there were measures taken. I know that we knew that there were some envelopes on the Hill that were being treated carefully. Even in our own personal office, every Member, I think, gets a certain degree of mail that you wonder who’s sending it and the contents of it. I think there were a lot of fears, particularly among the junior staff that are typically the ones that open that mail. I think the reality of what was happening was very scary. Once again, young people are generally the front
lines of a lot of the staff on the Hill, and so these are difficult jobs when you think about it on a level of more than just opening mail. When you’re dealing with something that potentially dangerous, it changes your attitude towards the job, so we had to really take precautions and really follow the lead of what we were being told to do with the mail—return any suspicious packages.

Now there’s a whole screening process that’s in place, but at the time there really wasn’t much of that from my recollection. Most of that mail was just delivered straight to your office, and you were responsible for opening the packages. So now that’s changed quite a bit, but I guess I don’t recall the details of that day, per se, I just know over time there were a number of scares and envelopes arriving to the Hill that people were concerned about. I think Senator [Thomas Andrew] Daschle’s office was the target of one suspicious package, but it did make you a lot more aware of even through the mail system, the vulnerability that the Capitol complex and the related House and Senate buildings have.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Did you ever get tested for anthrax?

**KOLOSZAR:** No, I didn’t. But we did have a staffer who was on the Senate side at the time that did have to get tested. So that was a little stressful experience, not only for her but certainly for the office. You hope that nobody ever faces that kind of exposure, and that was sort of the new normal then. Nobody had ever heard of anthrax, nobody knew what it was, and the gravity of that, so a lot of these things were all real-time pieces of information that you were trying to grapple with. The media coverage, too, sometimes as much as it’s providing information, it can heighten it, and so there was a lot of concern about how much, if at all, should we be handling any mail that comes through the office. So, and that created a whole backlog. That was also a...
frustrating experience, too, because there were pieces of mail that I’m sure, you know, took a long time to get processed then, not only in the immediate aftermath but certainly, and even now, if you mail something to the Hill, it can take a while to go through that whole process and be screened and arrive at the offices that they’re intended for.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Well, there was some controversy early on about whether or not to shut down the Capitol complex, and the House ultimately decided to shut down and then the Senate hemmed and hawed a little bit. Do you remember what that experience was like for you?

**KOLOSZAR:** Just a little bit. I do know there was a lot of debate about it and how much they needed to show a sign of strength and keep things open versus take the precaution of closing the facilities. I know there was debate over that. In our case, because Mr. Moran’s district is so close to the Hill, we were able to operate out of the district offices, so that proved an option that most congressional offices just didn’t have. So we could work off of computers in the district office, and we could function relatively well, even when the facility is closed. Or if it needed to close in the future, we were then able to kind of locate at the district office and work off of that system.

**KOWALEWSKI:** That’s very interesting.

**KOLOSZAR:** It just changed everything in terms of how systems are backed up and how offices now have protocols for how to operate offsite. We had drills after that on separate facilities that were set up to operate off of, and they did create that. I remember working, I think it was GSA [General Services Administration] had dedicated office space that we worked in for a while, which we took advantage of. But unlike a lot of the other offices, we had at
least a separate office that the Congressman and the staff could function out of if need be.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Well, other than the mail, what type of changes did you notice on the Hill after the anthrax attacks?

**KOLOSZAR:** Oh, after anthrax there was the whole evacuation procedures that started, and the escape hoods that became the norm. Having to be trained on that, all the things that are commonplace now were not common at the time. And mandatory training on that, and at a time before that, people probably would have chuckled at having to do something like that. Why would that even be necessary? But after that, it’s a sobering thought to think, “Okay, if something biological, chemical contaminant is in one of these buildings, what do you do?” So those were all real concerns, things you didn’t really want to think about, but you had to go through the training. You had to go to a meeting place for when you evacuated the building so that everybody could be accounted for. Because that was one of the concerns out of 9/11, that, people just kind of went in all their separate directions, so it was hard for some offices to get a head count of where their personnel were. Thankfully there was no direct impact that the Hill offices had on that day, but it did make you realize that you had to have some procedures in place.

So there were instructions for each office to have an emergency plan, to have medical supplies and have designated personnel within your office that were responsible for playing the lead role. We had—like every office—to go through and grapple with that, and how are you going to meet up, and who’s in charge, and how do you communicate with the Member? Cell phones proved problematic on 9/11, so you had to have a means by which to try to stay in touch.
KOWALEWSKI: So, all in all, anthrax, it was disruptive, but it didn’t really change the day-to-day activities of your own position?

KOLOSZAR: I don’t think so. And I can’t remember the point when my position changed in the office. I later became the chief of staff in the office. So a lot of the things that I was grappling with at the time, in that role, were ensuring safety of the staff and just the overall protocol, so you feel a lot more responsible for everybody that works there—constant balancing act of having to get a job done and having to exercise care with people and how much they had contact with either mail, or just overall concerns of safety. Those were all things that everybody was grappling with at the time.

But I think anthrax probably crystallized a lot of that. But I think 9/11 certainly was the starting point of that long journey of a changed environment for how people operated and how you thought about your own safety. I don’t think people really thought much of terrorism. It was always an overseas phenomenon for the most part, and that dramatically changed on 9/11. So I think people were a lot more cognizant that bad things can happen and you have to kind of really not think the worst case scenario all the time but really be prepared to operate in an environment if things had taken a turn for the worse.

KOWALEWSKI: Well, one question I meant to ask you earlier about 9/11 concerns the Joint Session on September 20th, when President [George W.] Bush came to speak to both chambers. Did you watch that?

KOLOSZAR: That’s the one in New York?

KOWALEWSKI: No, this was the one on the 20th.

KOLOSZAR: The President came to the Hill?
KOWALEWSKI: Exactly, yeah the, and I guess Vice President [Richard Bruce] Cheney stayed back.

KOLOSZAR: Yes, and I have vague recollections of that, but I don’t have clear recall of the day itself.

KOWALEWSKI: Okay.

KOLOSZAR: More from the media exposure and having watched the address. But not as much from specific things in the office that day or leading up to that.

KOWALEWSKI: Okay, well, is there anything else you’d like to add?

KOLOSZAR: Oh, well, I think we’ve covered most of them. I think the one thing that I took away from a lot of this, too, was the tremendous work that is done on a daily basis by a lot of the people in Mr. Moran’s district that are involved in fire and rescue and really played a pivotal role on 9/11. I think a lot of times that is overlooked. That really was a reminder, I think, on 9/11 is that you live in these communities that are prepared to address not only a local crisis but are there in case of a national crisis at any of these facilities that are in their jurisdiction. I think that’s something we’re thankful for, that we have a tremendous asset there, very well equipped, very professional team of people, both on the security front as well as just people that are very well-versed. The medical personnel and we have a resource here with our federal government, but we also have a resource on the local level, too.

KOWALEWSKI: Well, that’s all I have for today.

KOLOSZAR: Okay. Well, I appreciate you asking for my perspective and if there’s anything more I can offer, but there’s certainly a lot of people I’m sure you’re hearing from that have very valuable recollection and insight from that day.
There’s a lot of things that we probably didn’t even touch on that all sort of factored into what happened afterwards and how we’ve changed as a country.

KOWALEWSKI: Yes, you know, this project is interesting, because no two people have said the same thing, so—

KOLOSZAR: Oh really? Oh, see that’s interesting, because I was afraid I’d be a little redundant of some of your other people that you’ve interviewed.

KOWALEWSKI: No, not at all.

KOLOSZAR: Okay. Well, I hope I didn’t ramble too much.

KOWALEWSKI: No, it was great.

KOLOSZAR: You got me talking, and then I started thinking about things and how things have changed. And one other little point, and this is more anecdotal on the side, but I didn’t really get a chance to mention it, you did ask me about local issues. I guess preceding 9/11, Mr. Moran had been working with the Arlington County Fire Department. They had come to him and made a request. They had provided a lot of support to not only the Pentagon but other federal facilities when they were in need of quick response, and they were wanting, I think, a new fire department, or, you know, fire house, or other resources to respond in the event of an emergency. I remember Mr. Moran had shared that request, I think it was with the Pentagon, and had kind of gotten denied. And even from the Appropriations Committee at the time they thought well it’s not really a suitable request at this time.

Well, 9/11 changed all of that. And certainly there was a lot of reimbursement to not only Arlington but the other jurisdictions that provided a lot of the resources and support on 9/11. But it was just kind of
an interesting twist. We went from trying to fight a fight that really didn’t gain much traction to one that resources just suddenly became a lot easier to secure in light of what happened. And not to say that the spigot was gushing with money, but it was a lot easier of an argument to make to the Pentagon and to the Appropriations Committee that these were jurisdictions that played a fundamental role and, at a minimum, needed to be reimbursed and be well equipped to respond in the event of another emergency of that magnitude.

KOWALEWSKI: And there’s also some debate about whether the Capitol Police would receive more funding for personnel or technology. Were you at all privy to that debate in particular?

KOLOSZAR: Yes, I do remember it, and I know there was a debate about that. The balancing act, and Mr. Moran certainly played a role in that. I think at the time, he was either the Ranking Member on the Legislative Branch Appropriation Subcommittee, somewhere along the way when this debate was raging, so there was that whole backdrop to what needs do the Capitol Police have? Do they bolster the force with manpower more? Do they need more technological resources? That got to be a heated debate at one point, but it did sort of all work its way out. I know that was something that Mr. Moran was involved in, given his position on the Appropriations Committee and also just his district being right there.

KOWALEWSKI: Yes. Well, this has been great.

KOLOSZAR: Well, thank you. And let me know if there’s anything else that I can help you with, and I hope that the project is a successful effort.