“I wasn’t going to walk away from my job knowing that this was as serious business as could possibly have happened in the congressional district, in the city, in the country, and if that was going to be my little part to try and help, that was going to be it. So I decided to stay, and I ended up staying seven more years. During that entire seven years, the issues I was dealing with were predominantly 9/11-related issues.”

Tom Quaadman
May 26, 2011
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project Abstract</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing Practices</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citation Information</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviewer Biography</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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

**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 26th, 2011, and we’re in the House Recording Studio. Today, I’m with Tom Quaadman, former chief of staff for Representative Vito [John] Fossella of New York, to discuss his memories of September 11th, 2001, and also the anthrax attacks of October 2001. To start today, could you talk about your personal memories of September 11th, beginning that morning?

QUAADMAN: Sure. September 11th was a remarkably beautiful day. It was one of those September days in New York after Labor Day. There’s not a cloud in the sky. The temperature is just right. I happened to be up in New York that day. I was not in Washington. I had actually taken the day off because it was primary day in New York, and I was helping a friend who was running for city council with his primary.

I had spoken to my wife on the phone at about 7:00. I went into my friend’s campaign headquarters. Somebody had the news on. I think the channel was New York One, which is an all-news channel. They broke in. They said there was a fire at the World Trade Center. I spoke to Congressman Fossella on the phone because he was on the runway in Newark Airport. He was coming down to Washington. Actually, before we knew about the fire at the World Trade Center, we just ran through the day and what was going to go on for the week. We heard the news about the fire, and nobody really knew at the time that a plane had hit. There was some discussion of what was going on. There was some speculation, might have been a helicopter that had hit the building or a small plane. A caller called in to the news program, who was in a car coming out of the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel, which is not that far from...
the Towers, was just describing the fire and all. He said he saw a large tire bouncing down the roadway. It wasn’t too long after that that the second plane hit. It was pretty apparent at that point that this was a terrorist attack, it was not an accident, and that this was a well-coordinated attack, something that we had not seen before.

From that point, I immediately went into our district office. Our district director was overseas on vacation. [I was] trying to get a sense of what was going on. I spoke to our Washington office because at that time we didn’t have Blackberrys, so you either had email if you were at the computer at the office, or we were talking by phone. So I was talking to our office manager in Washington, trying to get a sense of what was going on down here, if they were getting any news here in Washington about what was happening in New York.

Things obviously were developing awfully quickly, and there seemed to be—we almost fell into this perverse cycle. It seemed that the Washington office tended to know more of what was going on in New York. Where I was sitting, in my vantage point in New York, I sort of knew more of what was going on in Washington. When I heard that there was an explosion at the Pentagon and there was also a later erroneous report that there was an explosion at the State Department, I told our Washington staff to leave. Because we knew there was an attack in New York. It appeared then that there was also a coordinated attack in Washington. If people were going after high-value targets, there’s none better than the U.S. Capitol. So for their own safety, I told them to shut the office and to go home or to go to a place of safety. At that point, I remember the first Tower coming down, and I have a recollection of the second Tower coming down. When the second Tower went down, I was just in shock because you knew there were thousands of
people who died in that instant. Not wanting to sit around the office, I sort of wanted to try and be proactive in doing something. I went to the Congressman’s house to check on his wife, to make sure that his wife and family were okay. I spoke to him on the phone because, obviously, all air traffic had been grounded at that point.

JOHNSON: What was he doing at this point? Was he on the runway at Newark?

QUAADMAN: He was on the runway. They brought the plane back. But what had also happened is that New York City was then completely cut off. They cut off all the bridge traffic. The bridges were closed. You could not get in or out of New York City. So we had to make arrangements for the New York City Police Department to bring the Congressman back into New York, which we did through police escort. Sort of had to do this through a roundabout way because they closed Newark Airport. He went to a friend’s house in New Jersey. We were able to get him back into Staten Island.

I was with our communications director, Craig Donner. We went from the Congressman’s house and drove to the 122 police precinct on Staten Island, which is the headquarters of the police department on Staten Island. I talked to command there, the Borough Commander, Tony Marra, just to get a sense of what was going on, but more importantly, if there was something that we could do to help them. He had spoken about how the Staten Island Ferry Terminal, which is on the north end of Staten Island, was being used as a relay point, that they were actually using the Staten Island Ferry to ferry in emergency equipment and emergency personnel. It was obviously also being used as a way to bring residents back from Manhattan. Craig and I went up to the Staten Island Ferry Terminal. When I got there, I saw James Oddo, who’s a city councilman from New York, who’s a good friend. He started going through the list of the upper hierarchy of the New York City Fire
Department who had died. They were people who we both knew because Oddo and I had also worked in the city council as staff members. He just started rattling off the people who had died. This was the very top level of the fire department.

I went into the terminal just to, sort of, get a sense of what was going on. It was just chaos. You had off-duty firefighters and policemen there. You actually had retired firefighters and police officers there that were looking to do something to be helpful. I saw a friend of mine who was a firefighter. He was in shock. He had a blank stare on him. I went up to him, and I said, “Gary.” I said, “Were you off today?” He said, “Yes.” He goes, “I was on vacation. My firehouse has been wiped out.” He worked in downtown Manhattan. I think his firehouse is located on Great Jones Place. As he said, everybody’s gone.

At some point in the afternoon when I was there—I had missed the Congressman by the time I had gotten there. He actually went straight to the ferry terminal. We had told him what was going on there. He actually went into downtown Manhattan. Also, to get a sense of what was going on, he also wanted to talk to his constituents, who were coming back.

JOHNSON: This was on September 11th?

QUAADMAN: This was all on September 11th. He wanted to try and give them comfort and also to get a sense of what was going on. Right next to the Staten Island Ferry Terminal is a minor league baseball park that actually had been built a year or two before, where the Staten Island Yankees play. There was actually some discussion that was going on, that that was actually going to be used as a morgue. There was speculation at that time that there were going to be tens
of thousands of bodies. That they were going to have to use the ferry to bring bodies back and to do that. Though, obviously, that never happened.

I do remember at some point when I was up there that—I remember hearing the fighters going overhead and having the distinct thought that I would never hear a fighter jet over the United States because of an act of war. I was trying to talk to people up there, see what we could do to be helpful there wasn’t much we could do.

At some point, the Congressman had come back. He came back over and I met up with him. He had actually been—he had tried to get up north towards the Trade Center when the World Trade Center collapsed. We were obviously talking about what we knew, what was going on. He was talking about what he knew. We went to the 120 police precinct, which is just across the street from the ferry terminal. He spoke to—this is towards the end of the day—he spoke to the roll call of police officers who were coming on to the night shift. Vito sought to rally them because, obviously, they were also stunned and also to talk about a little bit of what he had seen. We also talked a bit about what we were going to do the next day, and we made a decision that we were going to Ground Zero. We were going to try and go to the World Trade Center to assess what had happened, what was happening, and then to try and take that information back down here [to the Capitol] and act on it as best as we could.

JOHNSON: At this point, or during this time, were you in touch with anyone from DC? I know you had said you had sent the staff home, but was there any way to communicate with them and to let them know what was happening?

QUAADMAN: It was awfully difficult. There were problems with the phones when we were in New York City. Obviously, we’re working on office cell phones or land
line if we were in an office. What had happened is that the phone circuits were just completely overloaded. You would constantly get a busy signal. If you tried to get through to somebody, it would take you an awfully long time. I remember my wife worked in DC at that time, and she would take our—we had a baby boy who was two years old at that time—she would take 395 over the 14th Street Bridge to work. They left around 9:00 or so. It took me a couple of hours to actually get through to her to make sure that she was okay. In terms of trying to communicate, it was awfully, awfully difficult to do. I was trying the best.

JOHNSON: How long did you stay in New York?

QUAADMAN: I stayed up through the 12th. I left probably about 5:00 or so on the 12th because, at that point, they had reopened the bridges. I thought it was more important for me, at that point, to get back to Washington because, obviously, we were going to have to start working on things down here in order to respond to the attacks.

JOHNSON: On the 12th, did you make it to Ground Zero?

QUAADMAN: Yes. What we did is we had—again, it was the Congressman, myself, Craig Donner, our communications director, Nick Traficenti, who was a former New York City Police Detective. He was with the Intelligence Division when he was a police officer. They actually deal with a lot of intelligence issues, either dealing with terrorism, organized crime, or the like. He had a lot of experience in the police department, and he had just retired not too long before 9/11, and I had hired him to be the Congressman’s driver. So the four of us, and then we also had a police escort, we went over. What we did is we took the Staten Island Ferry over, and it was really something out of the twilight zone. There was absolutely nothing in the sky. There was absolutely
no boat traffic or ship traffic in the harbor. The only thing that was operating in the harbor was the Staten Island Ferry, and again, they were bringing personnel and equipment over. We were in the pilot house. It was remarkable because, as I said, there was nothing in the sky, nothing in the water. It was almost complete silence in a city full of 8 million people.

We got out of the ferry terminal, off the ferry. We walked through the ferry terminal and walked out to downtown. First sight we saw was combat soldiers in full gear, which, again, is something I thought I would never see here in the United States. It was almost as if it had snowed because there were inches of dust throughout downtown Manhattan. We walked up Church Street to go to the Trade Center. There were burnt-out vehicles all over, some that had already been stacked up, many of them with their tires burnt out. Walking up Church Street, there were just shoes. I can’t describe it. There were shoes all over the sidewalk, all over the streets, as if people had either run out of their shoes or had been blasted out of them. There were papers all over the place.

I remember we got to Church and Liberty Street, which is right at the Trade Center. I had seen the Trade Centers being built back in the early 1970s, late 1960s. You don’t realize this, but they were a mental geographic reference point. I know if I drove into Staten Island on the Outerbridge, I would always sort of look that way. You would see the Trade Center out there. No more than a Washington resident—same way that they use the Washington Monument almost as a reference point. I remember being there—the Trade Center’s not there. You know rationally it’s not there, yet, in my mind’s eye, they were still there.

We saw a firefighter who was from Staten Island. He recognized the Congressman. I don’t know if they knew each other or not. But he said to
him, he goes—Vito said, “How are you doing?” He goes, “We’re doing okay. I’m looking for my brother. We’re going to find him.” There were construction workers, or hard hats, who were coming down there. Everybody had this determination of, we’re going to go in there, we’re going to find people. As bad as that situation was, and it was absolutely horrible—it was like hell on earth. You had fire all over the place. You had what was probably the equivalent of a small city of the United States pulverized to dust. And you had policemen, firemen, emergency service workers, construction workers, all there with, we’ve got a job to do. Let’s get down there and do it. You had retired firefighters going in there because they had their brethren in there. Same with the police. It was incredible.

JOHNSON: What are your personal recollections of the Congressman at this point? Especially since, as you mentioned, there were so many emergency responders that came from Staten Island.

QUAADMAN: Yes. Staten Island is a unique place because, for a lot of people, there are only two career paths. Well, there are two career paths. You either work in the financial district, or you go and you become a policeman or a firefighter. Our congressional district had more policemen and more firefighters in our district than any other congressional district in the country. We lost, all told, probably about 350 people. If you look at our congressional district, probably only had two percent of the metropolitan area’s population, yet we probably lost 10 to 11 percent of the casualties on that day. But, of course, we didn’t know that on September 11th or September 12th. But we knew we were going to get hit, and we were going to get hit hard.

I remember the night of September 11th, watching [New York City] Mayor [Rudy] Giuliani on television, trying to prepare people for an enormous death toll. We were probably lucky that the planes didn’t hit about 45
minutes later than they did. If they had, there would have been a much, much, much, much larger death toll than there actually was. So we were just trying to get a sense of how bad things were in terms of the damage in Manhattan. How many people—what was the toll in terms of the dead, in terms of the wounded? What was going to be needed to rebuild? What were the resources we were going to need? New York City does a great job. We have the finest policemen, the finest firemen in the world. But they needed help as well. Were there going to be more attacks? We didn’t know at that point. Nobody knew at that point. How were we going to try and find the missing? What were the impacts on downtown Manhattan? What were going to be the impacts on the financial markets? Those were all things we were trying to think about, grapple with. How long was downtown Manhattan going to be shut down for?

What we were trying to do when we were up there on the 12th was trying to deal with this on a human level on the one hand—trying also to determine what we were going to have to do. That’s what he was trying to do. That’s what we were all trying to do in our own way. I remember we walked north of the Trade Center. We walked towards City Hall, just to also figure out how bad it actually was. In any direction that you walked, as I said, there were inches of dust. This summer day—again, the 12th was the same as the 11th. There was not a cloud in the sky. It was sunny. It was moderate temperatures. Yet it looked like we had just been in the midst of a snowstorm. We were just trying to figure out what had happened, and what did we need to do.

**JOHNSON:** When you were able to return to the Capitol, what were your priorities at that point?
QUAADMAN: I drove back. I remember I got back to our district office about 4:00. I remember I hadn’t eaten all day, so I just ran out for a second to get a slice of pizza and bring it back. People were crying on the sidewalk. I left not too long after that. I drove back down. I remember it was bizarre because there was nobody on the highway between Washington and New York. The next day, we all went back to work. Actually, our Washington staff had been back to work on the 12th. First thing I did is I sat them down and told them what I had seen and the little that we knew. The reason why I say the little that we knew is there was so much conflicting information that was being bandied about. And also just to make them understand, what they knew, but to also articulate whatever we had been working on on the 10th, tear it up, throw it out because we’ve got a whole new agenda we’ve got to deal with.

Later on that day, the 13th, I took Vito to the White House. The New York delegation had a meeting with the President [George W. Bush]. That’s where the delegation talked to the President and said we need $20 billion to rebuild New York City. And the President said, “Well, we’ll do it.” I distinctly remember when we left the White House, there were troops on the streets outside the White House. Somebody called me as soon as I got back to the office and said, “Oh, is everything all right?” I said, “Yes.” He goes, “Well, I guess there had been some sort of threat or something at the White House.” Those days and those weeks, time seems to blur because there was just so much that was going on.

JOHNSON: What do you recall in the weeks afterwards? How would you describe the overall atmosphere at the Capitol?

QUAADMAN: It was somber. All the partisan differences were shelved. Everybody was united. Everybody knew this was an act of war. The New York state delegation was always a little bit of a difficult animal. The reason why I say
that is because New York State is much different than any other state in a way because you have New York City and you have the suburbs. Even Long Island, if you go out to Suffolk County, if you go out to the far end, you have Boston radio stations. You no longer get any New York stations, right? You have the Hudson Valley. You have the Adirondacks and the North Country, which is way up by Canada. And then you have the Western Tier. Buffalo is closer to Cleveland than it is to New York City. New York State, to a degree, is almost like three or four states put together. That, to a degree, at least in my time, had made it somewhat difficult for the state to act, sometimes, in a cohesive manner. If you had three or four unique geographic areas, or regional areas, it sometimes got hard to have the same interests. So, unlike other states, sometimes it was hard to coalesce around an issue.

Well, this was one time where everybody worked together. There were no political differences on these issues. There were no regional differences on these issues. Everybody worked together. [New York] Governor [George] Pataki came down, outlined what his vision was of what needed to be done. We all tried to see what we could do. There were unique issues that started to crop up.

When I got back, I called J. C. [Julius Caesar] Watts Jr.’s office, to speak to his chief of staff, because they had gone through the Oklahoma City bombing. I just wanted to see if they could give me a sense of what we were going to have to do because there’s no rule book for this. They said to me, “There are constituent issues we’re still dealing with to this day based on that. It’s going to be very difficult, and it’s going to be a very long road. You’re going to be working on these issues for the rest of your congressional career.” And they were right.
What was probably even more unique with 9/11 than with other attacks or other catastrophes is that we started to deal with issues three or four years down the road that were just beginning to present themselves. We were having first responders, we were having construction workers that had worked for weeks down at Ground Zero, were suddenly, at the prime of their life, some of the strongest people you could ever meet, are being cut down by rare cancers, respiratory issues, and all. So we started to deal with a whole set of issues then.

We had issues on how to rebuild the Trade Center, get downtown back up and running, get New York City back up and running. In the days immediately following the attack, get the stock markets back up and running. So this wasn’t only an attack on New York, it was an attack on a unique juncture in our economy. Obviously, it was an attack on Washington, it was an attack on Pennsylvania and Virginia. We had a lot that we had to do.

**JOHNSON:** At the time, did other offices, congressional offices, reach out to you to try to offer assistance?

**QUAADMAN:** Yes. We were fielding a lot of calls like that. We were getting calls from Congressmen and women from around the country, seeing how they could help. They had first responders or whomever that wanted to help, that wanted to give resources. We were making sure that we got them in touch with the appropriate people, with New York City government. There was tremendous outpouring of people who wanted to help in terms of charitable assistance or whatever. We tried to see what could be done with that. That went on for quite a while.

It wasn’t too long after that President Bush came down. I think it was on that Friday. He went down to the Trade Center—to Ground Zero—but then we
also had—there was a steady stream of congressional visits that also started after that. I know Congressman Fossella helped arranged it and went up with the Speaker [John Dennis Hastert] to go to Ground Zero. He did that a lot with the leadership and also with other Members, to try and give them a sense of what had happened, and also what we were facing, and to sensitize them to that. That was helpful because the legislative process came fast and furious with the response. We had the Victim Compensation Fund that was established. You had the PATRIOT Act. You had the authorization of military force. There were just a lot of things that were happening. But also gave people an understanding of the enormity of the task at hand.

JOHNSON: Did you get a sense that the leadership and rank and file Members were receptive to these trips and really wanting to know exactly what was going on?

QUAADMAN: Yes. They wanted to go up there, they wanted to see what had happened and also just to get a sense of what was needed and what needed to be done. Again, if the New York delegation had united—I think if you look at the House and the Senate, everybody united as well. This was not a situation of, well, you had something happen in place X. Well, does place X need the money or not? This was, we have to do something; what’s the appropriate way to do it? How do we rebuild New York? How do we rebuild the Pentagon? What are the security changes that have to be made? Again, were there going to be more attacks or not? That was an unknown at that time, too.

JOHNSON: On September 20th, President Bush came to speak to Congress for a Joint Session. Did you attend that Joint Session?

QUAADMAN: No, I watched from the office.
JOHNSON: What are your recollections of that night?

QUAADMAN: The firmness of the President’s speech. I think the one recollection is that we were all united. We were all in this together. I remember whatever channel I was watching—I think the historian Stephen Ambrose was a commentator. Obviously, Ambrose—his body of work was World War II. He was talking about how everybody was united in a similar fashion as it had happened after Pearl Harbor. That’s probably my recollection of that night, was just how everybody was in this together.

JOHNSON: What were some of the things that your office was doing to try to help your constituents? For example, disseminating information for them or resources to help them out.

QUAADMAN: Yes. We were trying to do a lot of things, from the small to the very large. Because of the amount of people that we had missing, and the people who were dead, we went through a very long period of time where there were funerals. There were funerals without bodies. It seemed like a very, very small thing, but it was a small token. We worked to make sure every family received an American flag. Give people counseling. We had business owners who owned businesses in Manhattan that were shut down. We also had businesses in our district that were obviously having issues. Working with the Small Business Administration because they have programs to deal with that. Trying to get a sense of what we needed to do in the early days. When the Victims Compensation Fund was passed and Ken Feinberg was appointed, we helped arrange with him and other community leaders to come in and have a town hall meeting with victims’ families. I believe the first meeting that he had like that was in our district.
Also, we started to deal with other issues legislatively. As I mentioned, we were dealing with the funding to rebuild New York, but our district also borders New Jersey. On the New Jersey side of the Arthur Kill, which is what separates Staten Island and New Jersey and also the Kill Van Kull, which is another body of water, the same, there’s tremendous concentration of chemical plants, of oil refineries. Congressman Fossella was on the Energy and Commerce Committee. We started to work in chemical plant security.

We had an issue with transportation projects. Obviously, every transportation project needs to have an environmental impact statement, needs to have environmental assessments. For those transportation projects in downtown New York, those papers were located in the World Trade Center. They were all destroyed. Legislatively, we were actually faced with the situation where, if you looked at the law in the books, you had billions of dollars worth of transportation projects that would have to stop because this paperwork didn’t exist. But all the data that went with the paperwork was also destroyed. So we worked successfully to get a waiver to make sure that these projects continued to work, so that New York continued to move—so that construction workers can continue to work.

We had issues with the financial markets. The World Trade Center was only a couple of blocks away from the New York Stock Exchange; the New York Mercantile Exchange was right there, which are important markets for our capital markets in the United States. Working to get those back up and running. But we had also been working on a bill to give relief on fees that investors pay for every transaction when they buy or sell a stock. Those fees fund the SEC [Security Exchange Commission], but at that time, I believe those fees were collecting something of the order of three times what the SEC needed. We had been working for two or three years on a bill to reduce those fees.
fees to ensure that the SEC had more than adequate funding, but also to give relief to investors. That bill passed in an effort to get the markets back up and running.

Our district staff really had to deal with a number of different issues that they had never had to deal with before in terms of helping people not only cut through red tape, but also to try and figure out what services did people need and how we could best match up the services needed for those. What did we now need to do legislatively, both from a local standpoint, but also from what we see as a national standpoint? We started to work on that. Eventually, we also passed legislation where it was just a simple gesture, but we thought it was important to have an annual remembrance of September 11th as Patriot’s Day, which was Congressman Fossella’s bill. Eventually, we also worked with other members of the delegation to have a joint session, commemorative session up in New York as well.

JOHNSON: There’s a few things I want to ask you about based on what you just said, but I wanted to go back to a topic. You mentioned that there was a feeling of unity among the New York delegation, and then also just Congress in general. How long did this really last for? You’re speaking of legislation that you’re able to get passed because of the circumstances, but really how long did this take place?

QUAADMAN: I think it lasted for a while. I think what eventually created the fissures within that unity was the Iraq War. But on 9/11-related issues, the New York delegation hung together. As I said before, after a period of years, we started to see that the first responders were having health issues. Congressman Fossella, Congresswoman [Carolyn Bosher] Maloney, who was the driver, Congressman [Jerrold Lewis] Nadler, Congressman [Peter T.] King, sat down and worked together on the 9/11 health bill. If you look at those four
people, they’re on opposite sides of the political spectrum, but politics have nothing to do with it.

We needed to make sure that the first responders that took care of us we were going to take care of them. In the course of that work, and to show the response that New York received from around the country, I think we discovered there was one congressional district that had not had a first responder or volunteer working at Ground Zero. So 434 congressional districts, in one way or another, sent people into New York. Again, the 9/11 health issue wasn’t even a New York issue. That was a national issue. It took a while to get that bill passed, and it did, but the New York delegation really hung together to get that passed. On 9/11-related issues, even though there may be differences on how people may feel that there should be responses to terrorism, there was still unity with that.

JOHNSON: How often did you find that you were traveling back and forth between the Capitol and New York in the weeks following 9/11?

QUAADMAN: I was probably unusual with some chiefs of staff. I tended to do a lot of that anyway. So, on average, during my time when I was Congressman Fossella’s chief of staff, I was probably up in New York three to four times a month on average. I did do that during that same period of time. I remember, though, I was only in Manhattan twice in the two months after 9/11—after September 12th, rather. I remember I went to the Al Smith Dinner up in New York, where Vice President [Richard Bruce] Cheney spoke. His speech was about how the war against terrorism was going to make some fundamental changes to American society. I remember the Irish singer Ronan Tynan sang “God Bless America.” It was a unique experience to hear him sing it that night. But I also remember driving back to Staten Island that evening, and I was able to
take the Brooklyn–Battery Tunnel back. And being stopped at the stoplight just outside the tunnel, and you could still the smoke from the Trade Center.

I also remember being back at some point in December. I had a meeting up at City Hall. Walking out of City Hall, and again looking over to where the Trade Center was, and it just wasn’t there. Which, to my mind, was still something that was unusual. But I do remember, just going back to September 12th a second, when we were up there—I had gone to law school at New York Law School, which is only about three blocks from the Trade Center. I went to law school at night. I worked during the day. I worked for the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office for a portion I was in law school. I worked for the Commissioner at the Department of Consumer Affairs, and then I would go to law school at night. A lot of nights, I would have a ride home, but there were some semesters I would have to take the ferry back. I would sort of walk to the ferry terminal from law school, and I would always pass by the Trade Center. Walking back at 9:30, 10:00 at night, I would just sort of think about what my future was going to be. What job was I going to get, where I was going to be 10 years from now, whatever else. That was just sort of the idle thoughts I would have passing the Trade Center.

I just remember being at Ground Zero, thinking about my son, who was two years old. My daughter wasn’t born yet. That whatever opportunities I thought I had walking past that point, that my son was going to grow up in an America that was going to be fundamentally different. That he was going to have to grow up in an America that was at war. This wasn’t going to be something that was going to be over in a year or two years. There were going to be fundamental changes that were going to happen. I just felt it was sad for him that he wasn’t going to grow up in the same open society that I had. That it was going to probably be a little more closed. It was going to be more
security-conscious. There’s a loss there. I think from a personal level, it was something that I knew was going to happen. I just felt bad for him.

JOHNSON: One issue in particular that was really important in your congressional district, even before 9/11, was the Fresh Kills Landfill.

QUAADMAN: Yes.

JOHNSON: Can you briefly describe the history, and then also how 9/11 changed everything?

QUAADMAN: Yes. Fresh Kills Landfill was the largest landfill in the world. The Fresh Kills Landfill was originally a swamp. Robert Moses, in the 1940s, created the landfill there. When you talk about a landfill today, you talk about a facility. A facility that has lining. A facility that has a number of safeguards to catch leachate. Leachate is a byproduct of a landfill which is a mixture of liquefied garbage and water, which obviously is unhealthy. What had happened was that the Fresh Kills Landfill, over a period of 40 years, became the largest open-air dump. The reason why I call it a dump and not a landfill, it had none of those protections. The Department of Sanitation just started to dump garbage into the swamp, and eventually built it up to the point that it was actually the highest point on the Eastern Seaboard. I think it was 250 feet or 300 feet. During the 1980s, 1990s, they were projecting it to go as high as 500 feet. There were tremendous smells that emanated from the landfill. There were tremendous issues with leachate. There was a tremendous amount of water pollution that emanated from it.

Before Congressman Fossella was Congressman, he was a city councilman. Staten Island was instrumental in the election of Rudy Giuliani as mayor in 1993—provided the margin of victory for him, which was only 40,000 votes. Guy [Victor] Molinari, who’s a former Congressman, was borough president.
After Rudy was elected in ’93, Vito became a councilman in 1994. One of the things we did in 1995 is we introduced a bill into New York City council to close the Fresh Kills Landfill. We not only introduced the bill, but we had 35 cosponsors, which was a veto-proof majority—supermajority to get a bill like that passed.

Well, needless to say, the mayor wasn’t necessarily happy with what we did, but what it did do is it set up a whole chain of events that led to the closure of the Fresh Kills Landfill. What had happened was that—and this was a very, very, very important issue for Staten Islanders because Staten Islanders traditionally felt that they had been neglected by the city. They had to live with this dump because the Fresh Kills Landfill at one point took 25,000 tons of garbage a day.

The [Edward Irving] Koch administration of the 1980s reduced that to 14,000 because they forced the private carters to go to other places, but it was the only repository for trash in the city. Staten Islanders felt that they were dumped on by New York City, but that was the only city service that they got. It had actually led to a secession movement in 1993 to split Staten Island away from New York City as its own separate city, which, actually, the referendum passed overwhelmingly on Staten Island, but the enabling legislation was never passed by the state legislature. We sort of set—Councilman Fossella, along with Borough President Molinari—set the stage to get the Fresh Kills Landfill closed, which the Giuliani administration agreed to do not too long after.

But what had happened after 9/11, all of the debris had to go somewhere. A decision was made very quickly by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation—it was going to have to go to the Fresh Kills Landfill even though it had been closed. I remember getting a call from
Gavin Donohue of the DEC [New York State Department of Environmental Conservation]. I don’t remember if it was September 11th or September 12th. I think it was the afternoon of the 11th. “We’ve made the decision. We’ve got to reopen Fresh Kills because the debris has to go there.” So here you have something that was our number one issue. It was the number one issue of Staten Islanders. We had been fighting legislatively down here to prevent an interstate waste ban, transportation ban, from being passed into law, which would have forced Fresh Kills’s reopening, and here we have a snap decision made, reopen Fresh Kills. It was obviously something that has to be done.

There was an enormous amount of work that went up there with the first responders, with the federal authorities, the Army Corps of Engineers, of sifting through there, disposing of the debris after, if there was evidence that they could find of things, and the like. Unfortunately, it also became an issue with victims’ families because, obviously, with sifting through the debris, even though it would also be moved out later, they felt that they didn’t want the resting place of their relatives to be at the Fresh Kills Landfill. That unfortunately was something that they saw as happening up there. It was one of those difficult issues we had to work with.

JOHNSON: Earlier, you mentioned the commemorative meeting that took place in 2002. What are your personal memories of that day, and if you can just also describe a little bit more detail of Congressman Fossella’s role in that meeting?

QUAADMAN: Sure. There are some people in New York City who thought that a commemorative congressional session was an appropriate way to mark the anniversary of 9/11. Congressman [Charles B.] Rangel had made the request. Congressman Fossella had done so as well. I think there was some reluctance
by some with the leadership to do that initially. We felt it was important, and, again, the delegation banded together. Congressman Fossella was the only Republican from New York City, so he communicated with the leadership on that—actually quite strongly at times about that that was an appropriate way to mark a very sad one-year anniversary. Again, we thought it was appropriate to show, again, national unity and solidarity with New York City. Congressman Rangel did an awful lot of work on that on his end, we did ours, and everybody else did as well.

The commemorative session, again, took place in Federal Hall, which is the site where George Washington was first inaugurated, where the first Congress actually met. Historically, people forget, but we are a nation that was born in a revolution. New York City, for its part, played a big part of that. New York City, or Manhattan, as we know, a good portion of it was burned down during the revolution. The 9/11 attacks were the first acts of aggression against the mainland United States since the War of 1812 because Alaska and Hawaii were territories during World War II. So it was appropriate that a site of the nation that had seen such strife before would again be—that Congress would give that act of solidarity we thought was an important way to mark the anniversary.

JOHNSON: What did that mean to you personally and to your constituents? Did it mean a lot to them to have Congress travel up to New York for the session?

QUAADMAN: For our constituents, yes. They thought it was very important. People were in shock immediately after the attacks. As I said, there were people crying in the street on September 11th, on September 12th. If you lived up there, you went through weeks and months at a time where the papers just carried the photos of everybody who was missing—stories of the funerals. Any which way that you turned, you were always faced with 9/11. It was almost a portal
to—New York and the people who live there are never going to have closure and never going to move on from it, but also to bring it to another stage, to come away from that sense of shock, of the numbness. I think the commemorative session helped in that way. It may have been a small gesture by Congress to do it, but I think it was a very important one.

JOHNSON: What security changes did you notice at the Capitol in the post-9/11 era?

QUAADMAN: All the streets are suddenly closed. People are more aware of their surroundings, of what they were dealing with. You’re actually seeing armed people walking about. I think in the Capitol it was a little different than maybe in other places because we had had the shootings of the two police officers three years before [in 1998].

People, I think, were already a little more security-conscious, but, obviously, we began to see the drastic changes that were taking place. The concrete barriers that were being put up to prevent truck bombings and the like. So there were some very visible changes that were being made. Obviously, the Air Force jets that were overhead or that were patrolling all the time was something that was new. I just remember at one point—I think I was flying up to New York not too long after September 11th. I remember being on a plane, going from Washington to New York, where everybody was just nervous before the plane took off. The airports—the enormous security that was happening there. Did it make life more inconvenient? Yes. But did everybody understand why this was happening? Yes. And that there was a need for it? Absolutely.

JOHNSON: I wanted to switch gears a little bit at this point and ask you a few questions about the anthrax scare that took place about a month later. From what you recall, where was the information coming from that the congressional offices
received? It was very fast-moving incidents that were taking place. Who was giving you information at that point?

QUAADMAN: I seem to remember it was from a variety of sources. Some of it was from the news. Some of it was getting some updates from the Capitol Police. But it seemed that there were bits and pieces that were sort of flowing from different vantage points. My recollection is it just seemed that there was never—anybody really had a full story. But that, again, was also something that was coming fast and furious, and it just seemed from so many different places. I remember Senator [Thomas Andrew] Daschle’s office had received something. I believe that NBC News up in New York had received something. It seemed very fragmented. It was happening in a very disjointed manner.

JOHNSON: Shortly after anthrax was discovered on the Senate side, the House recessed for five days, so there could be a full environmental sweep. How did that disrupt your office, and where did you go during that time?

QUAADMAN: It disrupted it tremendously and at a very inopportune time because we were dealing with some very serious issues back home. We were also located in the Longworth Building at that time. It took the longest for the Longworth Building to be reopened. Again, we were also dealing with the situation where we didn’t have Blackberrys. So you had cell phones, you had computers that you could use. It was also very difficult to also use your home computer to tie into the House system at all. It made it extremely challenging.

Our district offices, obviously, were okay, but what we tried to do is actually have the Washington staff sort of work from home. Eventually, they opened up the GAO [Government Accountability Office] Building, where they put
the House staff, but that was in very cramped quarters. It wasn’t a great work environment. But one of the things we also did was we also held a lot of meetings in the Capitol when the Capitol reopened. We used the Rayburn Room or other offices that we could over there. Eventually, when the Cannon Office Building reopened, there were a couple things we were working on. Congressman King was gracious enough to allow some of our staff to work there. There was a period of time there where we sort of had to make do with whatever worked best, but it was not the most ideal working conditions to deal with at the time.

JOHNSON: For you and the staff, was there, at this point, an emotional fatigue, because this was coming so quickly after 9/11?

QUAADMAN: Yes, you almost had no sense of what was next. Yes. There was a little bit of an emotional fatigue factor that went in. What was difficult as well is you’re dealing with people who are very smart, are very active people, are very proactive people, and are there to do what they believe is right for their community, for the nation. So let’s just say type-A personalities. What became difficult, particularly with anthrax, was, again, we had a period of disruption with 9/11. We know we’ve got a lot of work to do. We’ve got a lot of difficult issues to deal with, with anthrax. Suddenly your world is again thrown upside down for an extended period of time. It makes it very difficult to do your job. So, from a staff perspective, it was difficult to make sure that morale was good because people had a sense that they couldn’t get their jobs done, and that was not a pleasant feeling.

JOHNSON: Along those lines, how did you separate your own personal feelings of loss and anxiety and any other types of emotions—based on the fact that you were representing constituents from Staten Island who had been affected so
directly by the attacks—but then also realizing that you had a lot of work to do? How did you and your staff handle that during this time?

QUAADMAN: You just sort of have to work through it. It’s as if you have an open wound that you have to ignore. You can’t ignore it, but you also have to ignore it at the same time. You have to separate the emotional from the rational, which is never an easy thing to do. It takes a lot to do that, but you have to remember, you’re a professional. You’re there to do your job. You’re there to use your ability and best judgment to do that job. You can’t let the emotions override your judgment and your clarity of thought. That can be a struggle at times, but you have to do it.

JOHNSON: Before we end today, I had a few questions to wrap up. One of them is what are your lasting memories of September 11th, and, in particular, if there’s one image or one visual memory that no matter how much time passes that you think will stick with you, what would that be?

QUAADMAN: Two things on September 11th. I mentioned before about how the Trade Center was this geographical reference point. I just remember, wherever I drove in Staten Island on September 11th, I saw the plume of smoke. You couldn’t escape it. You would always see it. It was always there. The other point that still sticks with me today is to hear the fighter jets go over. The fact that the Air Force is scrambling jets over New York City because somebody had attacked was something I had never thought I would ever hear in my lifetime. That was incredible. I said before, being in shock when the Trade Center went down, I just remember being numb with that. I do remember just the smoke and the fighter jets going over just being imprinted on my mind.
JOHNSON: Looking back, is there anything that you wish that you or your office, or even the House, could have done differently after 9/11?

QUAADMAN: Do you mean in responding to 9/11? You have to judge that period of time with the information that was available at the time. Could we have done things better? Yes, I think probably. Did we do the best we could have at the time? I think we did. Like I said before, there’s no rule book for this. I would hope nobody ever has to go through something like this again. The outpouring of the country to help the people in Virginia and New York was enormous. Our national response has been enormous. We sit here, 2011, we still have troops in Afghanistan. What I think we have to think about—may have wanted to think about, but I don’t know if it was even possible—could we have thought through more of what the implications were of the actions we were going to take? That’s a very difficult thing to judge.

Looking back at it, I think one thing we have to realize is it wasn’t only an attack on the United States. This was an attack on the set of beliefs that are not religious beliefs, but a mindset that’s rooted in what we would recognize as being medieval times of the Dark Ages. We’re sort of operating in a traditional 21st century mindset. I think what we have to remember as a country is we have enormous freedoms. We have freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of association, that run directly counter to that Dark Ages mindset. Do we need to have enhanced security? Absolutely. Did we need to take a military response? Absolutely. But we also have to remember that the ideas that are espoused in the Declaration of Independence, that the ideas that are espoused in the Constitution, are not American ideals—they’re ideals for mankind. I think those ideals are as much of a weapon against terrorism as military, as the economic, and the political are. I think we have to remember that, and I think we may have articulated it
better in the aftermath of 9/11. I don’t think we can ever forget that is who we are, that is who we stand for, and if somebody’s going to attack us for it, it’s because they understand inherently that the power of those ideals is much stronger. Because if you look at where the world was in 1776, and where it is today, it has come a hell of a lot closer to where we are than to where the Dark Ages were.

**JOHNSON:** It’s been almost 10 years since the attacks on September 11th. Do you think you have any sort of different perspective now that you’ve had time to reflect?

**QUAADMAN:** Looking back at it, I think we were too complacent as a country. There was a crescendo leading up to 9/11. We had the attack on the World Trade Center in 1993. We had the Khobar Towers bombing [in Saudi Arabia in 1996]. We had the bombing of the embassies in Africa in 1998. We had the attack on the USS Cole. Al Qaeda was working through a very systematic attack on the United States. We didn’t view it as such. We had also walked away from Afghanistan after the Soviets left in 1989. I think if we were to look at it—we were, I think, too complacent and not cognizant of the fact that people didn’t like us, didn’t like what we stood for. So I think we have to sort of remember that the world is a dangerous place, we cannot be complacent about our security, and that we just can’t walk away from problems and not expect them to come back at some point in time.

**JOHNSON:** What was your reaction with the recent news about the killing of Osama bin Laden?

**QUAADMAN:** On a moral level, you don’t rejoice in somebody’s death. However, this was somebody who masterminded an attack on the United States. If we were to look at it, this was a combination of Pearl Harbor and Antietam. There were many Americans who died in the World Trade Center attacks as died in one
day in Antietam. The difference is those were civilians who died in 9/11. This was a threat to the United States. This was a man who was a threat to the world. We’re in a better place because he’s gone because he was plotting against us. I think this was also a message to others, that if you’re going to attack the United States, there will be a response. It may take a day, it may take 10 years. There will be a price to be paid. I think we have to remember that during that period of time, he was still plotting against us. Is somebody else going to step in? Sure. But that doesn’t mean that we should stop bolstering our national security. Are we better off for it? Sure. Would the world have been better off if [Adolf] Hitler had been killed in the 1930s? Sure. Have lives been saved because Osama bin Laden was killed? Absolutely. There’s a positive price that came out of that. We should also remember, too, for as many Americans that he killed, he killed more Muslims. That fact should not be lost on others as well.

JOHNSON: Lastly, today, how do you think the events of September 11th, 2001, have affected or possibly even changed your life?

QUAADMAN: I think it changed it tremendously. At that point, I was thinking about leaving Capitol Hill. I had been the Congressman’s chief of staff for four years at that point. I had a job to do. Staten Island, where I grew up, Manhattan, where I was born, had been attacked. I wasn’t going to walk away from my job knowing that this was as serious business as could possibly have happened in the congressional district, in the city, in the country, and if that was going to be my little part to try and help, that was going to be it. So I decided to stay, and I ended up staying seven more years. During that entire seven years, the issues I was dealing with were predominantly 9/11-related issues.
So did it change my life? Absolutely. Did it change the course of a nation? It sure did. Was I able to do anything to help? I hope I did. I tried to do it. There’s only so much you can do. I think, to this day, of all the people that lost family members, and there is a price that they paid that we can never contemplate. If I could do a little bit to help the situation, that was the best I could do.

JOHNSON: Is there anything else that you wanted to add today?

QUAADMAN: The only thing I would just add, to sort of build upon what I had talked about before, we’re now 10 years past 9/11. We obviously have had a turning point in the war against terrorism with the death of Osama bin Laden. But Vice President Cheney was also right. This isn’t a war that’s going to end with the death of one person. This isn’t just a situation we can walk away from. I think in order to prevent another 9/11 from happening, we have to remember from the mistakes of our past. We just can’t walk away from situations without thinking through what the implications are. What we also have to do is, as much as we have to ensure national security, we also have to balance that with the fundamental freedoms that we have. That we can never lose what we are, and that is a free people. It’s a very difficult balance, but it’s a balance that we have to strike. We have to ensure that we are vigilant in fighting against terrorism. We have to do what we can, to the extent that we can, to eradicate conditions that foster terrorism. We also can’t lose sight of who we are. That’s a very difficult thing, but it’s a balance that we’ve had to strike for over 200 years. Sometimes it’s been easier than others, but we’ll get through this.

JOHNSON: Thank you for coming in today.

QUAADMAN: Sure. Thank you.