

Patricia (Tish) Speed Schwartz
Chief Clerk/Administrator, House Committee on the Judiciary

Events: September 11, 2001

House Committee on the Judiciary

Detailed description of the House Committee on the Judiciary the morning of the attacks.

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And I remember going in and talking to our staff director at the time, and I said, "What do you think we should do? Do we need to do anything right now?" And he said, "No, what we need to do is be here. This is the Judiciary Committee. If the one thing we need to do, we need to be here, and we need to be here now. So, I went back to my desk, and we were kind of going along, watching. Not doing much, but watching. The phones weren't ringing, and then we heard the news say, there's another plane that hit the Pentagon. And I just froze, because where my office was, if I look out to the left, it's the Southwest Freeway, which goes right across the 14th Street Bridge, and you could literally see the smoke billowing up. You couldn't see the Pentagon, but you could see the smoke. And now I was, everybody was numb. Oh my God, what's going on? And there were, there were no bells going off, there was no panic, screaming, anything like that. Everybody was very calm, but stunned, and in disbelief. The word surreal is used a lot, but that's what it was. It was, this is not happening.

And then I think it was Fox or CNN said something about a fourth plane. That they detected a fourth plane, and it was heading toward Washington. And it was a guess on their part where. The White House, the Capitol. Where was it going to go? Now the fear was intense. I walked back into my staff director, and he said, "Well, let people go that need to go. But there's certain people, you should stay, I'm going to stay, somebody else is going to stay." You know, it's like the captain of the ship, and we're the last one to leave. And just at that time, the phones started ringing. All the subcommittees were checking in, "What do we do, what do we do?" Then the Capitol Police came by, literally stuck their head in the door and said, "We're evacuating," and simultaneously, the fire alarms went off. Now, what you have to understand is, the best we had at the time was a fire evacuation. That was it. So, you literally leave the building and go to a parking lot across the street, and stand there and wait. That was the best we had, so that's what everybody did. I was one of the last people to leave. I made sure all the subcommittees knew, you know, follow your evacuation plans, we'd already had them in place. In fact, we had them mounted to outside—the door, you could see it as you walked out the door and everybody went where they were supposed to go.