

**The Honorable J. Martin Frost**

U.S. Representative of Texas

**Oral History Interview  
Final Edited Transcript**

April 28, 2011

Office of the Historian  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC

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## Table of Contents

|                       |     |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Project Abstract      | i   |
| Editing Practices     | ii  |
| Citation Information  | ii  |
| Interviewer Biography | iii |
| Interview             | 1   |
| Notes                 | 33  |

## **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](mailto:history@mail.house.gov).

## Citation Information

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

“The Honorable J. Martin Frost Oral History Interview,” Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives (28 April 2011).

## Interviewer Biography

**Matt Wasniewski** is the Historian of the U.S. House of Representatives, a position he has held since 2010. Prior to becoming Historian, he worked in the House for the Office of the Clerk for eight years as a historical editor and manager. Matt served as the editor-in-chief of *Women in Congress, 1917–2006* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006), *Black Americans in Congress, 1870–2007* (GPO, 2008), *Hispanic Americans in Congress, 1822–2012* (GPO, 2013), and *Asian and Pacific Islander Americans in Congress: 1900–2017* (GPO, 2017). He helped to create the House’s first oral history program, focusing on collecting the institutional memory of current and former Members, longtime staff, and support personnel. Matt earned his Ph.D. in U.S. history from the University of Maryland, College Park. His prior work experience includes several years as the associate historian and communications director at the U.S. Capitol Historical Society, and, in the early 1990s, as the sports editor for a northern Virginia newspaper.

—THE HONORABLE J. MARTIN FROST—  
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

**WASNIEWSKI:** This is Matt Wasniewski from the Office of the House Historian. It is April 28th, 2011, and I'm here with former Representative [Jonas] Martin Frost, and we're going to discuss his memories of the September 11th, 2001, terrorist attacks, and also the anthrax attacks which happened a bit later that fall.

Let me start, Mr. Frost, with your personal memories of that day, September 11th. Where were you?

**FROST:** Well, of course, at that time, I was chairman of the House Democratic Caucus, and I recall that I was in a meeting in Dick [Richard Andrew] Gephardt's back office. Dick Gephardt, of course, was the Majority Leader at that point. And, excuse me, Dick Gephardt was the Minority Leader at that point—we were in the minority. And this was in the Capitol building, it was in his back office. There were about 20 of us, give or take a few, and this was people in leadership, committee chairs, and committee ranking members. And my recollection is that we were talking about budgetary issues, but it may have been something else.

We were all seated around the table. We'd been in there probably for about 30 minutes, and someone from Congressman Gephardt's staff came in. First, I think, they passed him a note, and then either he or they said—because there was a TV in the room—said you should turn on the TV and look what's going on. So we turned on the TV, and there was the report of the second plane having hit the World Trade Center in New York. And we all just kind of sat around stunned and really didn't know what to make of it.

And shortly thereafter—and I don't remember the exact time—but shortly thereafter, Sharon Daniels, who was Gephardt's executive assistant and personal secretary, came into the room, threw open the door, and said, "You guys need to get the hell out of here!" We all just kind of looked at each other, and either Gephardt or someone said, "That's right, we'd better get out of the building." And so we all left. We all walked out the door and headed back to various places. I headed back to my office in the Rayburn Building.

As it turned out, of course, we now know that the fourth plane, and the one that crashed in Pennsylvania, was headed towards Washington, DC, either toward the Capitol or toward the White House. Most people think it probably was headed toward the Capitol. And the exact time sequence is a little hazy, but my recollection is that this was about somewhere around 10:00. It could have been, give or take 15 minutes. Had that plane taken off on time from Newark—it was delayed about 45 minutes because of air control issues—had it taken off on time, it would not, of course, not have been brought down by the passengers because they would not have heard about the hit. They would not have gotten the word about the rest of the attacks. And it would have, in fact, come to Washington, DC, and probably would have crashed into the Capitol.

Had we still been in the Capitol at the time that plane would have hit, a bunch of us would have been killed. It's that simple. Because Gephardt's office was on the part of the building facing the Mall, and presuming the plane had come in from the Mall direction, it would have crashed very closely



to where we were. And if it hadn't hit the office we were in, it certainly would have made it very difficult to get out of the building.

And I don't recall exactly—it may have been when I went back to my office, I got in the car, and decided the best thing—on my own, no one told me this—but I decided I needed to get out of the area. I was living in Alexandria, Virginia, at that time. I got in my car and drove across the 14th Street Bridge and went to my house in Alexandria, my townhouse. As I was driving across the 14th Street Bridge, I heard the report that a plane had hit the Pentagon. And in fact, I could see the smoke coming from the direction of the Pentagon.

Kind of a side note to this, at the time that this happened, my late wife who died a few years ago of breast cancer, was the Adjutant General of the Army. She was not stationed at the Pentagon. She was a one star general, and had been selected for a second star, but hadn't received it yet. And she was stationed at the Hoffman Building, which is in Alexandria, several miles from the Pentagon. My wife had been scheduled to be at a meeting with her boss in the Pentagon that morning. However, she had some personal things she needed to take care of. She was not able to go to that meeting, she sent two of her staff members. The point of impact of the plane at the Pentagon was her boss's office, three star general. He was killed, and my wife's two staff members who were attending the meeting were killed. Had my wife gone to that meeting, she would have been killed that day too.

It's interesting how close things are sometimes, how frail we are, and how if events had gone slightly differently, I might have been killed, and my wife might have been killed on that day. But it wasn't the case.

So I went back to my townhouse, and, of course, our cell phones weren't working, so I turned on the television, and just watched the news to see what was happening. And ultimately, then I got some reports, and there was some conversation about Members coming back when the coast was clear in the evening, which we all did, and we all met on the steps of the Capitol.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Let me just backtrack a little bit. You recalled your initial move was to go back to the Rayburn Building. Do you recall any early communications with your staff at that point?

**FROST:** No.

**WASNIEWSKI:** How were you and your staff communicating?

**FROST:** No, no, no. Cell phones didn't work, and I don't really recall. By the time I got back to the Rayburn Building, my recollection is that my staff either had left or was in the process of leaving. And I just went to my office. My office was on the fourth floor, took an elevator up to the fourth floor, picked up my briefcase, and walked straight to the Rayburn garage, where my car was parked, got in my car, and drove home. I don't remember if any of my staff was still in the office at that time, they may have been. But we couldn't, probably, someone had called them, or maybe my chief of staff had figured out that they needed to get out of the office, I just don't recall how that happened.

But the remarkable thing, to me, is that there was no way of communication. It may be that the Capitol Police or the Sergeant at Arms Office had sent out

a phone message, had called the office telling everybody to leave, I just don't know. But no one communicated with me. The only message I got was when Sharon Daniels, Gephardt's secretary, walked into his back office and said, "You guys need to get the hell out of here." I subsequently talked to Sharon, and she tells me that there had been some conversations back and forth with Speaker [John Dennis] Hastert's office, but I'm not sure if those conversations—about what needed to be done—but I'm not sure if those conversations had occurred before she came in and told us to leave. Ultimately, Gephardt and Hastert, and a few other congressional leaders, were taken to a safe location, the rest of us, of course, were left to our devices.

**WASNIEWSKI:** So you participated in that gathering on the Capitol steps on the evening of the 11th. What do you recall about that event in particular?

**FROST:** Well, I just recall that everyone was stunned about what had happened. And, of course, it was a spontaneous song, I think it was "God Bless America," I don't remember for certain now, but everybody broke into song. Then we dispersed, and I subsequently learned that some of the Members had not done what I did. They had hung around, they had stayed in their offices, and they'd gone over to where the Capitol Police are, tried to get information. But no one told us to either stay or leave, that was the interesting thing. Each of us acted on our own, and my instant reaction was to get away from the Capitol. I didn't know what was going on, I didn't know at that time, I didn't know that there was another plane that perhaps was heading to the Capitol. We didn't know how many planes there were. We didn't know what type of attacks were going on. We learned about the attack on the Pentagon, but we were as much in the dark as anyone else. There could have been 10 other attacks planned, for all we knew, and my own reaction was to get away,

to get clear out from the area, so that if there was an attack on the Capitol, I wouldn't be there.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Right.

**FROST:** But some of my colleagues stayed—a number of them stayed in their offices, didn't leave. And I don't know if they called into the Capitol Police and said, "What do we do?" My guess is it would have been hard for them to have gotten through to Capitol Police. I just don't know.

**WASNIEWSKI:** But throughout that day, you never heard any communication being disseminated from the Capitol Police?

**FROST:** No, never heard a thing. The only thing that I ever heard was what was reported on television. And at some point, there was a report on television that Members were going to come back and meet at a certain time, so I did, along with everybody else.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Tell me about your recollections about the legislative day of September 12th and the mood on the House Floor?

**FROST:** I don't remember when we—did we vote on things the 12th, or was it a couple of days later?

**WASNIEWSKI:** The 12th, you came back in, and there were talks on the floor, and there was legislative activity on the floor.

**FROST:** Well, I remember, of course, that we voted, authorizing the President [George W. Bush] to take whatever action was necessary to go after the people who perpetrated this attack on the United States. I just don't remember whether that vote was on the 12th or not, it may have been. But if it wasn't, it would have been right away, 13th or 14th. And we also, we passed some other legislation. Kind of the response was, when anything like this happens, it's always rally around the flag. It's always support the President, whoever the President is, whichever party, and try and protect the United States. So we were all motivated to do that. This was not a partisan time, of any partisan bickering at all that I recall.

**WASNIEWSKI:** The Capitol steps is a very spontaneous public demonstration of unity.

**FROST:** Right.

**WASNIEWSKI:** But do you remember any less formal demonstrations of unity among your colleagues?

**FROST:** Well, there was briefing, and, again, I don't recall the day, but it was shortly thereafter. There was a briefing for the House Democratic Caucus that I chaired, and the Republican Conference that J.C. [Julius Caesar] Watts [Jr.] chaired. So Congressman Watts and I jointly presided over the briefing. It was by the number-two person from the CIA, who came in and told us what they knew about what had gone on. And it was very interesting, we listened to this, I think his name was [John] McLaughlin, I'm not sure. But the number-two guy. We listened for about 30 or 45 minutes, and then I asked the first question. I exercised the prerogative of the chair, and Congressman Watts indicated it was okay for me to start. I said, "Mr. Director, I just

listened to what you said for the last 30 minutes or so, and I just want to make clear that I understood what you were telling us. Is it correct that you have just told us that the CIA tracked a number of these terrorists into the United States, turned them over to the FBI, and the FBI lost track of them?” And he said “That’s right.” He kind of talked around that, but it was clear that the FBI—the CIA knew who some of these people were, had followed them, and had turned them over to the FBI, and the FBI just lost them. That was pretty extraordinary, quite frankly.

But there was no partisan finger-pointing. No one tried to score any partisan points. The questions that were asked during that joint meeting of the caucus in the conference were very straightforward. Members on both sides just wanted information. We alternated. I called on the Democratic Member, and then Congressman Watts called on a Republican Member, and we went back and forth, alternating questions like that.

**WASNIEWSKI:** That’s very interesting. How long did that go on? Was that a long meeting?

**FROST:** At least an hour, but perhaps longer. It was on the floor of the House, and it went on for quite some time. But we were all stunned that anything like this could happen inside the United States. I mean, the most stunning thing, of course, was the—to me—was the picture of the building—the Towers collapsing. Of course, obviously, the initial of a plane—picture of a plane flying into the building was pretty stunning. But then, when you saw these buildings collapsing down upon themselves, you knew at that moment that a lot of people had to have been killed. That there was no way that that couldn’t have been—that couldn’t be a mass tragedy, both in terms of the

people in the building, and the people, the firefighters and the policemen who were called to the scene.

It's very interesting, about a couple of weeks later, my wife and I went to New York. I don't know if you remember that Mayor [Rudy] Giuliani had been urging business as usual, urging tourists to come to New York and spend money. And so we decided we'd do that. I had been chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee [DCCC]. I wasn't the chair of the DCCC anymore, but my wife had wanted to go see *The Producers*, the show on Broadway. And so I asked the fundraisers at the DCCC whether they knew anybody connected with the show. As it turned out, one of the producers of the show *The Producers* was a Democratic contributor. And so they put me in touch, it was a woman—I don't remember her name—they put me in touch with her, and she made two tickets available, two very good tickets available for my wife and me to go see the show.

We went up, we took the train up, had brunch at Tavern on the Green with one of my wife's friends—this is an interesting story itself. I'll go back to that in a minute. And then we were in touch with the mayor's office, and the mayor arranged for a car. I don't know, I guess it was the mayor's office—we might have been in touch with the police, I just don't know who did it, but they arranged for a car to come pick us up at our hotel and take us down to the site, to 9/11, to Ground Zero, and it was still kind of smoldering. While we were there, my wife spotted Giuliani walking around, and she said, "Let's go talk to the mayor." So we walked over and talked to him. He was very preoccupied, but we both said, "Well, Mr. Mayor, we're here"—we introduced ourselves. "I'm Congressman Frost, this is General Kathryn Frost,

and we're here because you asked people to come to New York and spend money." And he kind of said, "Well, thank you." He was obviously preoccupied.

Let me go back to the—we had brunch with one of my wife's friends. This is a woman who was the daughter of an Army officer, contemporary of my wife's, a woman probably in her early 30s, who was working in New York, and working in the World Trade Center, on the 60th floor of one of the buildings. She had been at a doctor's appointment that morning, she wasn't in her office. Had she been in her office, she would have been killed. It's possible if events had turned out differently, all three people having brunch together would have been killed, would not have been there. It's just remarkable the way things happen sometimes.

But this was several weeks after the event, and my wife and I, we always liked going to New York, and we got to see a show. And we got to see a show, and ate out, and we stayed at a hotel. And the rates in the hotels were way down, they were trying to get people to come to New York and spend money, so it was a nice weekend. Now, let me mention one other thing.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Sure.

**FROST:** I mentioned about my wife. My wife was, at that time, was the Adjutant General of the United States Army. One of her duties as Adjutant General was that she was in charge of casualty notification. She and the people who worked for her were responsible for notifying the families of all of the military personnel who were killed on 9/11. My wife had been selected to get her second star and to become a Major General, she was a Brigadier General.



There was to be a ceremony awarding her her second star in her hometown in South Carolina—a small town, Latta, South Carolina. And the three star general that she worked for had been scheduled to actually pin—go to Latta and pin on her second star. Of course, he was killed on 9/11. So they cancelled the ceremony, and she was notified shortly thereafter that she was promoted, effective 9/11. Her date of rank was 9/11, even though it was originally scheduled for some time in October, that they had gone ahead, because there was one fewer general officer, her boss. Even though he was a three star, and she was going to become a two star, but there was a general officer vacancy at that time. So they backdated her appointment to 9/11, 2001. Extraordinary things happened in connection with that.

As I mentioned, she was in charge of casualty notification. She was in her office at the Hoffman Building, and so we talked by phone. I was able to get through on the phone. And she had to basically stay there through the night. So the people who worked for her had a Congressman bring in pizza to their office. I went and picked up some pizza and took it over to them before I went down, I guess it was before I went down to the Capitol. Or maybe afterwards, I don't know if it was before or after I went to the Capitol to appear on the steps.

**WASNIEWSKI:** There are so many amazing stories from that day.

**FROST:** Yes.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Let me ask you a little bit about, in the days and weeks afterwards, do you recall press inquiries or coverage during that period where you were asked to comment?

**FROST:** I don't recall very much, no, I just don't recall the press coverage. I'm sure we all did interviews, I must have too, and I just don't recall very much of it. It was just so unlike anything that I had ever experienced, and that other Members of Congress had ever experienced, that it just is kind of a blur, in terms of what happened. Just was remarkable. I recently read Mika Brzezinski's book about her career in journalism. She talked about how she—I don't know if she was working for CBS, I don't think she was working for NBC, but she was working for one of the networks—and how she was in her office, about 60th Street, where it was, and how she immediately raced down to the site. Basically, she couldn't get a cab, ran the 50 or 60 blocks it was down to the site to cover the story. She talked about how she took off her high heel shoes.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Do you have any memories of the Joint Session when President Bush came down on September 20th?

**FROST:** Not a lot. Just that he was there, and everyone was very supportive, and everyone wanted to get to the bottom of this, find out exactly what happened, who did it, and for us to get on with bringing to justice the people who did this. I don't recall much beyond that.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Any special requests from constituents back in your home district that you remember being made at this point?

**FROST:** No, other than that everybody was for go get them, find these people. I recall, I was back in my district, and I don't remember how soon afterwards, and I was one of the elected officials who publicly spoke out in my district

against American citizens taking retribution against Muslim-American citizens. They weren't responsible for this. And in fact, it's interesting, there was a—the guy wasn't even a Muslim, it was a South Korean who ran a convenience store in Dallas who was shot and killed by people who just walked in and who were angry about what happened and wanted to shoot any foreigner. Just terrible things went on. And I actually went to one of the mosques in Fort Worth—I had parts of Dallas and parts of Fort Worth in my district—appeared with other elected officials, and urged the public to remain calm and not to seek retribution against Muslim Americans, who were loyal citizens of our country, just because of their religion.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Were you getting information from Muslim Americans who were still—

**FROST:** They were very concerned. They were very concerned.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Yes.

**FROST:** It was kind of unique for me to do this. I was, at that time, the only Jewish Congressman from the state of Texas, and yet I went and joined with the Muslim community and urged for Americans and for Texans to exercise some judgment here and not just to strike out against anyone who happened to be a Muslim.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Did that cause any blowback for you?

**FROST:** No, no, none at all. And it was exactly the right thing to do.

**WASNIEWSKI:** In the days immediately after the attack, and the weeks after, what security changes did you begin to see happening around the Capitol proper?

**FROST:** Well, I don't recall specific security changes. I do recall, whenever the vote was, to authorize—and this was later of course, to authorize President Bush to use troops against Saddam Hussein in Iraq, and this was—let me go back a moment.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Sure.

**FROST:** There were two different votes with two different Presidents. The incident I'm going to tell you about actually happened when Bush's father [George H.W. Bush] was President, not with George W.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Sure.

**FROST:** When Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait, which was 10 years before 9/11, and we knew that we were going to be voting on the issue of authorizing then-President Bush (41) to use troops against Saddam Hussein, we were all told to be on the alert against potential terrorist attacks. And particularly the Jewish Members of Congress were cautioned to be sure and report any threats against us. I did have a death threat phoned in to my office. I notified the Sergeant at Arms and the FBI, as we were told to do. This was back in 1991, 1992, that was not 9/11. The Capitol Police then assigned officers to go with me and to accompany me in Texas the first time I went back. But that was not after 9/11, that was after the first use of troops against Saddam Hussein.

After 9/11, I don't recall any specific death threats. I don't recall officers being assigned to me. I don't think they were. I'm sure we were—we're always told, every time something happens like this, of anything comparable to this, there's nothing that's exactly like this. The Sergeant at Arms Office and the Capitol Police get in touch with us, and they make certain recommendations to be more careful. Any time anything of consequence happens, they tell us, "Take your congressional license plates off your car, just have regular plates, so you aren't identified." And I did that at one point, but I don't remember if that was after the first use of troops against Saddam Hussein or after 9/11. I just don't recall when we did that, but for a while, I did take my congressional plates off the car. We were told just to be sure and report any type of security, any type of threat.

And, of course, then we started to have barriers erected around the Capitol and increased security, concrete barriers. There had been a threat against us, and my recollection was that it was prior to 9/11, but sometimes you lose track of the events. When two people tried to break into the Capitol and attack Tom [Thomas Dale] DeLay's office when he was Whip, and two Capitol [Police] officers were shot, killed, ultimately.

**WASNIEWSKI:** That was in 1998.

**FROST:** Yes, well ultimately, those people were apprehended. And so after that, security stepped up, and then after 9/11, obviously, security was stepped up even more.

**WASNIEWSKI:** So there was legislation of great consequence that was passed in the weeks and months afterwards. Any particular legislation stick out? There was the

authorization for the use of force, and there was also the [USA] PATRIOT Act.

**FROST:** Of course, we all, at the time, virtually everybody voted for the PATRIOT Act, there may have been a few people who didn't, but almost all of us did. I did. And we really did that without giving it a great deal of thought. We just assumed that well, this is what's necessary, and we want to authorize the executive branch to do whatever is required. After that, and in the years that followed, people did have a lot of second thoughts about the PATRIOT Act. It was fairly controversial when it was extended later on. But there was not any controversy at the time. Most people wanted to be on the side of the angels here. Most Members wanted to react strongly and to do whatever is required to prevent any further attacks against the United States. So there may have been one or two who objected on civil liberties grounds to the PATRIOT Act, but there were very few.

**WASNIEWSKI:** From a longer perspective, a little more particular too, how did 9/11 change emergency plans, in terms of your personal office in DC?

**FROST:** Well, we were given various drills. We were told to leave the Capitol, there were some drills we went through, and you were supposed to go to certain pre-determined places. It was pretty poorly planned, I thought, initially. It really didn't make a lot of sense what they were telling us to do. And we were—but generally, we were told just to be much more careful as we traveled about—particularly traveled back in our districts.

It's interesting, though, the attacks were on Washington, most of us assumed we would figure out—the Capitol Police, and the FBI, and everybody else,

would figure out how to make the Capitol safe. Where Members are really vulnerable—and this is tragically true after the shooting in Arizona recently with Gabby [Gabrielle] Giffords—where Members are really vulnerable is back in their districts.<sup>1</sup> Because generally, you don't have local police protection, the Capitol Police don't accompany you when you go back into your district unless there's been a specific threat. And we never have really figured out how to keep Members safe back in their home districts.

Back in the incident that I mentioned to you, after involving the first use of force against Saddam Hussein in the 1991 and 1992 context, I discussed this with my local law enforcement. And they said, "Well, Congressman, go ahead and have your town hall meetings, but we would recommend that, at least for a while, that you have officers, local officers, police, in uniform prominently displayed at those meetings, so that if anyone walked in, they would see that there was a policeman, that you had police protection. Not necessarily right next to you, but out in the audience." Now whether this would have stopped a true fanatic, I don't know. But the local law enforcement thought it might stop some people, if they saw that there were police there.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And could you just request those officers to be there, or is it—

**FROST:** Yes, you could at any point. A Member of Congress could call up your local police. I remember this in Grand Prairie, Texas, a suburb of about 100,000 people, and I had my staff call up the Grand Prairie Police. I was going to do a town hall meeting at City Hall, and they had—that was their recommendation, in fact—they provided a couple of uniformed officers to be on prominent display. But again, that was not after 9/11, that was after the

first use of troops against Saddam Hussein. After 9/11, I just don't recall. We may have routinely notified the local police when I was going to have a town hall meeting. If we did, it didn't last very long. We didn't do it for very long.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What effect did the attacks have on your staff here in DC or in the district? What do you remember of those months afterwards?

**FROST:** Well, my recollection is it had a very significant effect on the young people who worked for me. Their parents started questioning whether they should be working in Congress and Washington, whether it was safe for them in Washington. I don't remember if I had anyone quit, but I do know that it was a concern, particularly among younger staff members.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Jump forward a little bit, do you remember anything about the commemorative session at Federal Hall in New York City, which was held a year later, in 2002? Were you involved in planning for that, or did you attend?

**FROST:** I don't remember, I don't remember anything about it. I'm not sure that I was physically there. I may have been, I just don't recall anything about it. I probably was there because I was [Democratic] Caucus Chair. And I would think I would have been in attendance, but I don't remember anything about it.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Taking a longer view on this 10-year anniversary, what perspective do you have on those events now, 9/11, that you couldn't have possibly had at the time, but it, maybe, changed your memories, or made certain memories stand out?



**FROST:**

Well, at the time, no one really thought that that type of an attack was possible. Of course, you know that the author [Tom] Clancy had actually written of an attack like this before it occurred, and I'd read his book. With a plane, it was a Japanese pilot who was mad at the airlines or something. It wasn't a terrorist, but who flew his plane into the Capitol, at the time there was Joint Session, and killed a bunch of people. But that was fiction, and most of us thought well, that's kind of an interesting story that's not really going to happen. Although, as you know, it has been the practice for some time, and I don't know when it started, of having one cabinet member absent when there's a Joint Session of Congress, in the event there is an attack so at least one person in the line of succession would survive.

But those of us who are in public office—I can't speak for everyone—but many of us just kind of say, "Well, this was a horrible thing that happened, but I'm not going to change the way I function as a Congressman because of it. I'm not going to live in fear of someone attacking me, whether it's back in my district or in the Capitol. I'm just going to go about my business." Certainly, that was the case after the attack, the shooting of Congresswoman Giffords in Arizona. Most Members of Congress, though they were appalled and shocked that it happened, basically said this is not going to prevent me from talking to my constituents, to being available to the public. That certainly was my attitude after 9/11.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

Any general thoughts about 9/11, and the whole span of American history, where it stands out, what its significance is?

**FROST:**

Well, the significance, of course, is that more people died on 9/11 than died at Pearl Harbor, the attack on Pearl Harbor [in 1941]. And the fact that we could have an attack on a major city in the United States is not really something most of us thought was realistic. We knew in theory that there were terrorists out there. There had been events, and I don't recall when these happened, but there were events in London, in Japan, bombings in the subway system, we knew that this could happen. But we kind of, I think most of us just took the view that, "Well, it's not going to happen here."

Now after 9/11, then we realized it could happen here. But we all, and again, I can't speak for everybody. I think most of us assumed that given the proper authority, and the proper weapons and the ability, that our government could figure out how to prevent this from happening again. That if we empowered our intelligence agencies to act, that we're smart enough that we could figure out how to prevent this from happening in the United States again. Maybe that's not true. Maybe there will be another attack like this. It looks to me like some of these things that have happened between now and then have been averted almost by accident or averted at the last minute. If there were actual threats, and there were things that could have occurred, we don't know the details.

I do recall, it's interesting, I had a conversation with one of my colleagues a few years after 9/11—Henry [Arnold] Waxman from California, who's still in Congress. And Henry had at that time, had a daughter and grandchildren in Israel. Henry was telling me how his granddaughter, who probably was about seven at the time, had seen a suspicious package in a shopping mall, and had reported it to the authorities. This is a seven-year-old child. It turned out it was a bomb, and the authorities were able to diffuse it. Henry then

urged his daughter to come back to the United States, that seven-year-olds shouldn't have to be a part of deterring a terrorist attack.

It really hasn't gotten to that point in the United States, that we're not worried, although we've had shootings, of course, at schools, at Columbine, and other places, and at Virginia Tech, and at Fort Hood. We don't really—most of us don't think that it could happen in our community. And most of us think that our law enforcement—federal, state, and local—have the tools to prevent this from happening, unless it's just a deranged individual. It appears now that it's easier for us to head off a coordinated, planned attack by a foreign power than it is to prevent a single deranged individual from carrying out a terrorist attack.

But we all hope that our government is figuring this out, can figure it out, and will keep us safe. Although, there's no way in keeping us safe, probably, from a lone gunman who shoots up the campus at Virginia Tech or two students who killed their fellow students like at Columbine. I don't know how you prevent that from happening.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Let me shift gears a little bit, you were a member of the Select Homeland Security Committee, the precursor to the standing committee.

**FROST:** Yes, right.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Can you talk a little bit about how you were assigned to that and what your role was?

**FROST:**

It was a leadership committee. I was on there because I was part of the elected leadership of the House of Representatives on the Democratic side. I was caucus chair. It's very interesting. Other Members of Congress, the ones who came in and made presentations for us, this led to the creation of the new Department of Homeland Security. And some of them questioned what we were thinking about doing. One of them was Jim [James Louis] Oberstar who was then, I don't know if he was chairman of—he would have been Ranking Member, again, we were in the minority. I don't know if he was the Ranking Member of the [Transportation and] Infrastructure Committee, or whether he was the Ranking Member of a subcommittee, I don't recall what his title was. But he came in and said don't put FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] under the new Department of Homeland Security. As it turned out—and when you had the hurricane occur in New Orleans [Hurricane Katrina in 2005]—he was right. FEMA should not have been under the new Department of Homeland Security because it added an extra layer of reporting, and it slowed down the whole process. And there were other Members of Congress who came in and questioned certain things we were thinking about doing, but, ultimately, we decided to create the new department.

**WASNIEWSKI:**

Do you remember any of those—any meetings in particular of the committee? The first meeting, or any particularly controversial meetings?

**FROST:**

Oh, I have a picture on my wall at home of us in one of our meetings. No, I don't recall very much about it.

I do recall one thing, it has to do with local Texas politics. It has nothing to do with anything else. Senator Phil [William Philip] Gramm and

Congressman Joe [Linus] Barton—Joe Barton represented the district that Gramm used to represent when he was in the House—tried to get language written into the bill sole sourcing research contracts from FEMA to the Texas A&M system, in Texas. There are two large systems, the University of Texas at Austin and Texas A&M. They’re both separate systems, and they both have satellite campuses. Now, the University of Texas system had a satellite campus, very large campus, University of Texas at Arlington, in my district. And Bob Witt, who was the president of UTA called me and said, “Martin, this is not right. You shouldn’t write in giving all of the research dollars to A&M. We want some of that to go to the University of Texas, too.” And so I was able to get that deleted from the bill. Bob Witt is now president of the University of Alabama—he’s a good guy. But evidently, all University of Texas system presidents were on a phone conference call, and they said, “What do we do about this?” And Bob Witt said, “Well, I’ll call my Congressman, Martin Frost, who’s on the committee, and try and get this changed.” And he did, and I did. Just kind of a side note of what was going on.

**WASNIEWSKI:** You left the committee when it became a full committee in 2003.

**FROST:** Yes, I was never in the full committee.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay.

**FROST:** Standing committee. I was only on the select committee that created the department.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Was that by choice? Not an assignment that you wanted?

**FROST:** I don't recall what happened at the time. I was on the Rules Committee, and I was the Ranking Democrat on the Rules Committee. And generally, members of the Rules Committee, in most cases, couldn't serve on other committees. And my recollection is that somebody on the Rules Committee did wind up on that select committee, but I wasn't the one. And at that time, the Rules Committee was still an exclusive committee, meaning that you could only serve on things like the Intelligence Committee and the Budget Committee and House Administration.<sup>2</sup> You couldn't serve on any other standing committee. Speaker [Nancy] Pelosi subsequently changed that, and now Rules Committee members can serve on other committees too.

**WASNIEWSKI:** I'm going to skip a little bit ahead, about a month ahead. We talked a little bit about the subsequent anthrax attacks in the fall of 2002.

**FROST:** Yes, those were all on the Senate side.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Right.

**FROST:** And all of us were kind of stunned, again, when that happened. You figure, how in the world did that happen, and what do we need to do to prevent that from being injured or killed? But I don't know much about it beyond that because it was limited to the Senate as I recall.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Yes, okay. Yes, October 15th, Tom [Thomas Andrew] Daschle's office got the letter.

**FROST:** Right.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And the House closed up for business, so it adjourned on October 17th because of concerns of anthrax in the mail system.

**FROST:** Yes, we wanted to make sure nothing like that was going to happen on our side. One of the side effects of this was that it dramatically changed the ability of constituents to communicate by mail with their Member of Congress. All of our incoming mail was then sent to some facility, I'm not sure where it was—I think in northeast Washington—but some postal facility where it was screened before it came to us. And it looked like they'd been stomped, and they were stomped flat before they came to our office. They came in in very bad shape, and they were delayed by a couple of weeks. We didn't get our mail, so we told constituents, don't send us a letter. If you want to communicate with your Congressman, fax something. I don't remember if we told them to email, I'm not sure how widespread email was at that time. But we told them, if you have something that you need to communicate to us, take it to the district office, and the district office will send it up in a pouch overnight, or fax it to us, but don't mail it to us because we probably won't get it any time soon. So it had that practical effect.

**WASNIEWSKI:** So do you recall anything about the decision to adjourn the House for that week?

**FROST:** No, I don't recall.

**WASNIEWSKI:** There was no—okay.

**FROST:** Other than that, I think the assumption was, if it could happen in the Senate, it certainly could happen in the House. There's no reason why it wouldn't happen on the House side too. The only reason being that, if this were an uncoordinated effort by some nut out there, Senators are higher profile, and so most people don't even know who the Members of the House are, but they've heard of some Senators. If it were a coordinated effort by a foreign terrorist outfit, there certainly is no reason why they couldn't have targeted the House, just as they targeted the Senate.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Yes, the press, as they sometimes do, got ahold of it and made a point of, "Well, the Senate stuck around, the Senate didn't adjourn, but the House did." Do you remember any effects on morale over here?

**FROST:** No, I don't, I don't.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Again, how did, coming quickly on the heels of 9/11, were there any other aspects other than mail delivery in which the anthrax attacks had a—

**FROST:** Not that I remember, no.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Do you perceive them having a lasting effect on how your office operated?

**FROST:** Although it made staff very nervous. I recall getting one or two letters in my office that looked suspicious, someone thought were suspicious, and the staff didn't open them, and sent them away, or had the Sergeant at Arms or the Capitol Police pick them up. They turned out not to be anything. But it made people who opened the mail in the office very nervous. And usually, that's younger people.



That's the other thing, not senior people who sit around opening the mail, it's the receptionist or someone, a junior legislative assistant. Again, parents who said, "Why do I want my kid working in Washington when this is going on?" So to the effect that parents started questioning whether their young adult children should work for the federal government, particularly work for Congress, it did have an effect, at least for a while.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Did your office have to field any calls from concerned parents? {laughter}

**FROST:** I seem to recall that there were one or two. It might have been to my district office. I don't know that they were to DC. But you can understand why that would be a concern to parents. Also, we have summer interns. And generally, there would have been some time after that because this was September, and we wouldn't have interns until May or June, but we also have Pages. And some of the Pages—Pages are high school students, the summer interns are college students. And I always told people in my district who were interested in having their children serve as a Page—because we went up in seniority, I got the right to designate Pages, it's something that's done by seniority. And I said, "Well, if you're going to have your child, your high school student, be a Page, don't have them take off the whole year from school, just have them come in the summer, take off three months, so they don't have to miss a year of their high school." Even though there's a Page school here, and they get to go to school, they're taken out of their community for a year. But again, so I didn't have anyone that was serving as a Page at that time, any high school student, because again, my Pages only served during the summer, and my interns were months and months away from coming to Washington.

**WASNIEWSKI:** And again, from the district level, did you hear anything from constituents in the aftermath of the anthrax attacks?

**FROST:** Not so much from constituents, but my staff in the district was also concerned, and they were on high alert. Again, the district staff, generally, is much more vulnerable than the DC staff because you do have the Capitol Police. You have people here in Washington who look after us, but there's no one who regularly looks after your district staff. And Members of Congress can do two things, one of two things, in terms of their district staff. You can either be in a federal building, or you can rent in something not owned by the federal government. I always chose not to be in a federal building because the federal building was in downtown Dallas. Traffic was bad, and people had to pay to park. I had my offices out in my district, but those offices are much more vulnerable. Because if you're in a federal building, at least you have some screening of people coming in and out. But it was strictly up to the Members to whether you locate in a downtown federal building or whether you locate at private property. Ironically, it is often cheaper for a Member of Congress to rent a private office because the federal government charges you more for space in a federal building than you would pay out in a strip shopping center or out in a bank building.

**WASNIEWSKI:** How did you balance your time? In your situation, it would be different from a rank-and-file Member because you were in the leadership. But again, how did you balance your time in these months after the attacks with working here in the Capitol and going back to the district?

**FROST:** I don't recall that there was any significant change. My district, over the years, when I was first elected, I had a very safe district, and it became

progressively more competitive. And so the longer I was in, the more time I spent in my district, and I don't recall if this changed anything. I do remember planes not flying for a week or so, or two weeks, and people being stranded and not being able to get—and, of course, I couldn't go back to my district office. At that time, I stayed in DC. But I recall constituents who were in Europe who were stranded and couldn't get back to the United States, so it was some disruption.

**WASNIEWSKI:** What was your normal pattern for going back to the district, how often did you—

**FROST:** My normal pattern at that point was to spend almost every weekend back in the district. It's easy to get to Dallas because you have nonstop flights. American Airlines headquarters is at the DFW [Dallas/Ft. Worth International] Airport, and so there are lots of nonstop flights from Washington-Reagan [Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport] to DFW, so I didn't have any trouble getting back and forth as long as the planes were flying. I do recall that private planes were prohibited from flying in and out of Reagan for a while. So I had some constituents, or some people that I knew in Dallas who maybe didn't live in my district, but people I knew, wealthier people in town who owned private planes, and couldn't use their private planes to fly up to Washington for a while.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Finally, a general question about how 9/11 and the anthrax attacks may or may not have changed your relationship with colleagues here on the Hill. Did you develop any closer relationships with folks from your delegation, or in the leadership? How did it affect Members?

**FROST:** Not really, and the bipartisanship only lasted for a very brief period of time. It didn't last. It makes you think a little bit about your own mortality and your own safety, but it really didn't change the way things are done around here very much, other than it was harder to get in and out of the building. It took a little while longer. The mail service wasn't any good. But it really did not change things too much, I don't believe, for the long term.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Okay. That's the prepared questions I have.

**FROST:** Okay.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Are there any other topics that you don't feel like we've covered?

**FROST:** No, I think you've covered it pretty well. I think Members of Congress are human, just like anyone. We're just like everybody else. And different Members, I'm sure, reacted different ways. Some Members were much more intimidated, frightened about it. I had been in office since 1978. I'd been around a long time, and I basically just said, took the attitude, I'm just going to continue going about my business. This is not going to change the way I do my job as a Congressman.

My guess is that some of the younger Members, newer Members, they had made some changes, and this may have had an effect on them and their families. It's possible that some of their spouses may have said, "Do you really want to keep doing this job?" I'm sure that happened after the shooting of Gabrielle Giffords. Some of the congressional spouses may have said, "Why don't you go do something else?"

But I don't know about those—I didn't have that issue. My wife was in the Army, and my wife was very much a part of what was going on. In fact, after being Adjutant General, her next assignment was as commander of AAFES, the Army Air Force Exchange Service. She was responsible for opening all of the PX's, postal exchanges for the Army and the Air Force in Iraq and Afghanistan. So she was very much involved on an ongoing basis of what was going on. After we sent troops into Iraq, she strongly suggested to me I ought to go over there and take a first-hand look. I said, "Well, I'm not sure I want to go over there, I don't know if it's safe." She said, "Well, it'll be safe, and you need to go as a Member of Congress."

So I was part of a delegation, late in 2003, that went over to Iraq. This was right after Saddam Hussein was captured. We flew in and out of Baghdad, we overnighed in Kuwait, we didn't stay in Baghdad, of course. We actually went to Tikrit, and we saw the hole that he had been captured in. We actually got to climb down into the hole where he had been captured. And then we went to Fallujah, which was a very dangerous—it turned out to be a very dangerous place, it wasn't as dangerous when we were there.

So I guess the fact that my wife was in the Army may have altered my outlook a little bit, may have made me more prone to—I always had a strong national defense voting record, but it may have encouraged me even more to make sure that our armed services had exactly what they needed after this.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Did you ever travel to Afghanistan?

**FROST:** No, my wife went there. And she said, "This is 15th, 16th century." She told me how it was, so I told her, "I don't think I need to go to Afghanistan."

{laughter} She said it was very primitive and a tough, tough place. But no, I never went there.

**WASNIEWSKI:** Any thoughts on, again, in a very general sense, why it would be important for Capitol Hill staff members to have a historical awareness of what happened here on that day, September 11th?

**FROST:** Well, see, you've had a lot of turnover, of course, in the Congress, on a partisan basis. The House has flipped several times, had a lot of people retire. I think it's important for Members who were not here at the time to have some appreciation of what was going on, what was going through the minds of Members when this happened, what precautions were taken afterwards. The new Members don't know anything else. For all they knew, all of these concrete barriers have always been here. We've always had metal screeners at every stop. We've always had security, it wasn't always the case. And I don't have any problem with the level of security. I think it's important to keep elected officials safe.

So my attitude was you all figure it out and do whatever you think we need to have done to keep us, and the people who visit us, the tourists, safe, and we'll just learn to live with it. But a lot of new Members of Congress will have no appreciation, probably have very little appreciation of how it was prior to 9/11, unless they had been here as staff members, and some of them were staff members.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Reference to the mass shooting at a constituent event hosted by Congresswoman Giffords in her Arizona district on January 8, 2011.

<sup>2</sup> The House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.