Rayne Lykes
Staff Assistant, Office of the Clerk

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript
March 28, 2012

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

"And by the next week maybe almost the whole campus, House and Senate side had these little lapel ribbons that had been stapled and had given us something to do and had given people—you just wanted to feel like you could show solidarity. I don't really know how else to say it but something like 'we're here and we're staying' and so that's what we did for days. Made ribbons and people would come by and pick them up and suddenly everybody had them on. The workers moving furniture to the Members of Congress and we kind of wore those ribbons for months."

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Project Abstract

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

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

Editing Practices

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

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

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

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

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Interviewer Biographies

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.

Farar Elliott has been the Curator of the U.S. House of Representatives, within the Office of the Clerk, since 2002. She created the institution's first curatorial program and is responsible for the House Collection's 13,000 pieces of fine art, historical artifacts, photographs, and decorative art, under the direction of the House Fine Arts Board. Farar received her A.B. in History of Art from Bryn Mawr College and an M.A.T. from The George Washington University. Before coming to the House of Representatives, she worked in museums ranging in scope from Asian art to Southern history to historic New England sites.

— RAYNE LYKES —
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

JOHNSON: This is Kathleen Johnson with the Office of the House Historian, and today I am with Farar Elliott, who is the Curator for the House, and the date is March 28, 2012. We are in the House Recording Studio to interview Rayne Lykes, who was an assistant to Jeff Trandahl, the Clerk of the House, back in September 11, 2001. We are here today to talk a little bit about Rayne Lykes's memories of that day. To start off with, I wanted to ask if you could trace your memories—your personal memories—of what it was like on 9/11 at the Capitol?

LYKES: We got to work and, of course, immediately before the House comes in you have CNN on and a normal day. Beautiful day. I remember that. And the first plane had hit and suddenly somebody started looking at it and said, "Wait. Have you all seen what's on the TV?" So we started watching and, like, everyone thought how wild it was. Just a freak accident. And then it was not that long after, obviously, that the second plane hit and suddenly there was the reality of this is not an accident and shock, disbelief, and then I think a little bit of "Well, if they are hitting New York, this is kind of a not great place to be in the middle of the Capitol."

I know there was some people running up to the Speaker's Office and there were some meetings up there and quick talks. And then the Pentagon got hit and so it was immediately after that the doors were opening and they were telling everybody to get out. Of course that was before any annunciators or anything like that so it was loud. "Get out!" and so we all just ran. And that's what I remember is running out but still just to the front [of the Capitol]. Not very far, which you think about it, and if a plane really was coming, that

wasn't probably the best place to stand. But just kind of surreal and we just kept looking at the sky. It was kind of not smart and hopefully everyone would behave better next time, but that's kind of where we were and at that point I remember that there was a lot of talk about whether they were going to be able to get back in and go to the floor and finish out the session and do the parliamentarian issues that they had to take care of. So we probably stayed maybe about an hour standing out on the Capitol lawn and then eventually we realized, "Well, we are not getting back in the building. We need to just go home." That's kind of what that day was.

JOHNSON: A lot of people have told us that it was very difficult to communicate. So one thing I was wondering about was how were you able to communicate with other people in the Clerk's Office?

LYKES: Most of the immediate office stayed together. When we walked out, most of us were together but, of course, the Clerk's Office has a lot of different areas and people in locations that were all over the place. The cell phones didn't work. One of the things that we did do is when one person got through to a family member, we all kind of stood by the phone and gave everybody one number for her to call for our families since we couldn't reach them. You just were so frustrated, and you realize how quickly that you are so used to the telecommunications and rely on them. But that once somebody got a hard line that they at least could get a hold of all the rest of our families and let them know that we were okay and leaving the building. Once we got home we assumed that we could talk and we could. But it was a lot of walking back and forth. People were walking down to the [House] Page dorm and people were—it was a lot of walking around. People were just sort of strolling. It's like almost like after a fire drill with people not really knowing how long is it going to last, is this really real? And then, of course, rumors were coming that

the other plane had gone down in Pennsylvania at that point and nobody really [knew]. The rumors were just getting more and more, unfortunately, some of them were true so.

JOHNSON: Once you knew you weren't going back into the building then what happened after that?

LYKES: You know what? My boss drove me home to Georgetown. Gave me a ride and I can remember walking—he let me off a couple of blocks away [from home]. And at that point the planes had stopped but the jets had started, and the fighter jets were really low. We used to go up to Annapolis when the Blue Angels would come and that was always so cool to see how low they would come, and I can remember feeling that is not the same feeling of when you are watching an air show. And not knowing, you just didn't know what—it was so unknown, and it was so surreal. I couldn't believe that that was really happening but the jets I remember. I remember thinking, "It's not fun when it's not for show." I remember the jets.

JOHNSON: This is Jeff Trandahl that drove you home. What are your memories of him? He was Clerk of the House, so on that day and then in the days afterwards?

LYKES: Well, he's a good friend, so we were comforting each other and stuff like that. But the phone rang halfway to Georgetown. Of course, he had decided to give me a ride all the way across town, and somebody had gotten through and told him that he needed to go back and that they were meeting at the—I think the Capitol Police Center or something like that. So that's why he dropped me off about 10 blocks from my house and said, "Okay, go." He's a great guy, and under stress he gets better. And once he had a purpose that made him calm and controlled. I think everybody wanted that. We all thought, "Well if we could just have something that we knew we were

supposed to do and do it rather than just sort of being these lost, walking around going, not knowing." And so he had a purpose, and once the phone rang then he kind of went into emergency mode, so I jumped out the car and left. And the next day we all came back [to work]. He actually I guess sent a text or—I can't remember to be honest with you how, but we all got messages that if you feel comfortable, come back, but at the same time if you're afraid, you are not going to lose your job. Just do what you need to do.

Everybody came back, so we were all there the next day. That was when the ribbons started. So a couple of years before [in 1998], some Capitol policemen had been shot in the Capitol, and the Clerk's Office had put together some blue ribbons to sort of give out for people to wear as lapel pin lapels. It was something for the Pages to do back then, and it was just a sign of community and support for the policemen. So September 12, obviously no one was really working or worrying if the Xerox cases came in. You just didn't know what to do, but you wanted to be there and you wanted to feel like you were working towards something and so someone came up with the idea, "Well, maybe we should put together ribbons like we did for the Capitol Police." Okay, well, red, white, and blue ribbons? I mean, what are you going to do? And so we started thinking about it. Okay, well, I guess somebody will go out and buy some ribbons, and we'll start making them. That was when a good friend, Diane Wolf, who was a great lady and was a friend of the office and a big supporter of a lot of different organizations up on the Hill, and she happened to call and say, you know, "How are you all doing? And what are you doing? And is there something I can do to help." People wanted to do something like after any disaster. "What can I do?" And Jeff said, "Well, actually we are getting ready to try and find some ribbons—we thought maybe we could put them out for people to wear." And she

immediately said, “I’ve got the ribbon. I’ve got this ribbon.” And Jeff’s like, “Well, that’s great but we need a lot and a little thing of ribbon this big isn’t going to work.” And she’s like, “Oh, no, I have a lot.” {laughter} And she did.

Probably within an hour—she lived over at the Watergate—suddenly bolts of ribbon arrived and it was perfect ribbon. It was one thing of ribbon with red, white, and blue stripes and stars and that was just kind of amazing that somebody would have that and say, here. We all then kind of had a purpose and it was like okay, we’re going to make lapel ribbons for the Pages to do, for us to wear. I think we thought, maybe we’d make a couple hundred and that would be more than enough and so for the first day or two you are just sitting there cutting ribbon and stapling it and putting some pins in it and it was mostly the Pages and the Clerk’s staff that were wearing them the first day or two. But you would wear them out and you’d go to the [Capitol] carryout or you’d go to the post office or whatever and somebody would say, “Where did you get that?” “Oh, they have them in the Clerk’s Office.” Well, by the end of the week, so that was Wednesday. By Friday, offices were calling up, “My boss wants 10 ribbons.” “I am coming by to pick up 15 ribbons.”

And by the next week maybe almost the whole campus, House and Senate side, had these little lapel ribbons that had been stapled and had given us something to do and had given people—you just wanted to feel like you could show solidarity. I don’t really know how else to say it but something like “we’re here and we’re staying” and so that’s what we did for days. Made ribbons and people would come by and pick them up and suddenly everybody had them on. [From] the workers moving furniture to the Members of Congress. We kind of wore those ribbons for months. I think we

made maybe, 2,000, 3,000 ribbons. It was crazy. I don't know how Diane Wolf had all this but she did, and we just kept making them and that was sort of our little way of being able to wear our flag and say, "We're still here and we're going to stay."

ELLIOTT: Did the Clerk's Office get any response or feedback more generally about the ribbons beyond everyone wanting them?

LYKES: Of course. I think there were *Roll Call* articles and there were people [asking], "Where did this come from?" and "How did this all start?" I remember at the President's speech, maybe a week later, you'd see some of the Members had ribbons that were this big and some of them had tiny ones.[1] There was no template, we just made them. Some turned out huge, some tiny. It didn't matter. It was just do it. That's what I remember.

ELLIOTT: And were there any extras at the end? What happened to them?

LYKES: You know, I don't—there were, obviously, people moved on and they actually bought their own permanent flag and wore it on their lapels or they would get dirty. You'd put them on the outside of your coat, it started to get cold. They would start unraveling and then they would come back and want some more. I do remember that a year later when they did the commemorative meeting up in New York people were looking for them and they wanted to wear them again. But that was sort of, by that point I think that was the last push for the ribbon.

ELLIOTT: Is there anything else when you look back now regarding the ribbons that you'd have done differently?

LYKES: I don't know. I think the fact that they came so out of the blue. This remarkable lady who didn't even work on the Hill and certainly didn't have

to worry about depleting her enormous supply to just send up to us. And I think the fact that it gave us a purpose, especially those first two or three days afterwards and mindless work but more people came in and they wanted more and more. It was like we're doing something. We're productive, we're moving on even though it was all just cutting and stapling. It wasn't really tremendous work, but I think that was really helpful.

I know in other disasters that I've been through, people just want to feel like they can help and have a purpose. After [Hurricane] Katrina [in 2005] they just want to do something. I can remember the lines of people in New York lining up to give blood because they wanted to feel like they could do something. The tragedy there was there weren't enough survivors to really need it. I think that's what the ribbons were for us. Just a small little thing, but it made us feel like we were part of the community that we wanted to be in.

JOHNSON: You mentioned coming back on September 12 and wanting to do something, but could you just speak about what the atmosphere was like at the Capitol the day after and then the weeks afterwards?

LYKES: I think everybody was just in shock and certainly people my age remembered hearing their parents talk about, you know, Pearl Harbor and what that felt like, and I can remember thinking how that would be so crazy. Somebody attacked us? I think that before 9/11 if I had heard of the Taliban or Al Qaeda before, then it certainly didn't stick. It was one of those things they talked about on the news and it wasn't important. It wasn't directly influencing anything in our lives so I think it was the shock and I think that it was almost like your feelings were hurt. Like you couldn't believe we had been brought up being told that we were the greatest country and everyone wanted to get in here and everyone loved us and they wanted to be us. Not

that people hated us or hated what we stood for. I think that that was like the slow leak into our brains that there is a different world out there and it's not what we thought it was.

I think being back on the Hill certainly people were very anxious. We believed the Capitol building was, at one point, potentially a target. Was there another attack coming? No one knew. So, you definitely felt a sense of anxiety that you didn't feel going in on the 10th [day before the attacks]. That reality that not only were you a target as an American but you worked in a building that was the perfect target for someone to show how much they didn't like us. I think that anxiety was predominant throughout the Capitol. I can remember, especially because the planes had stopped, so everything was quiet except when the jets came. Somebody dropped some reams of paper or something. It was like this really loud [noise] and everybody was just so tense, and you heard something that you didn't know what it was. I'm not sure how jumpy people were in Idaho but certainly people that were up here on Capitol Hill, the anxiety was high. There were still so many people crying and it was just sad and you didn't really know what to do. Like I said, busy work was the best because no one could concentrate on important things. We wanted to be here but didn't really want to work on anything.

JOHNSON: You just spoke of the sadness and that made me think of some of the tributes and the ceremonies that took place afterwards. Did you attend any of those?

LYKES: No. I remember the Members, I guess maybe it was that night [September 11th] that they sang out on the [Capitol] steps. I remember watching a lot of it on the television—certainly the memorial service at the National Cathedral. It was so hard, and I think I felt this strange sadness but it wasn't personal. Gratefully, I didn't know anybody immediately that had died. So you felt this very strange mourning. We were sad but it wasn't our mother or

brother or even the lady down the street. It was just in general. Just this really tragic [event]—and it really was an end of sort of this innocence or idealism.

JOHNSON: What changes in security did you notice after the attacks?

LYKES: Almost immediately, they put up those jersey barriers everywhere. You couldn't get anywhere and they were hideous. People complained about it and I loved seeing them. People who didn't work up here were like, "Those are terrible and you need to keep the streets open." And I was like, "I think they are terrific. Put double up." {laughter} But, that did give you a sense that things had changed forever. It made you feel better, safer, but then it also made you feel, well, it's serious. They really are still going to try and get us. And so it was mixed feelings as the security got stronger.

JOHNSON: You spoke about the week after and how the office bonded and put the ribbons together, but did the attacks change your job in any way longer term? Was there any sort of effect on your day-to-day work or the Clerk's Office more generally?

LYKES: Well, interestingly, we had been working on the Capitol Visitor Center and the project was still in the phase of trying to get funding. The Clerk's Office was one of the House-side Officers that was involved in fundraising. It was supposed to be a part private, part public, funding for the building. I can't tell you how long after that but it was pretty quickly that we realized that Congress was now interested for security reasons, so the money would now be appropriated. We no longer were asking private citizens for funding. If the project was going to be appropriated, things were going to move quickly. So that part of my job sped up a lot and that was a big part of it was to start working on the Visitor Center. Our focus changed from visitors being the priority to how we could use the center for security for the Capitol—

evacuations, different things like that.

JOHNSON: When you were speaking about the ribbon a few minutes ago you mentioned the Joint Meeting that was held in New York City [in 2002]. Do you remember any of the planning that took place or did you attend that meeting? Any sort of memories that you might have about that event?

LYKES: Yes. We worked on that for a while and the Clerk's Office was very involved with it. I probably started going up to New York maybe May of [2002]. The Joint Meeting was to take place very close to the World Trade Center [attack]. I had not been to New York since the attacks and wasn't compelled to go. I had seen enough on the television but then we had to work up there, make plans and things. I thought it went well.

I think it meant a lot to the Members. With any tragedy, a year anniversary can sometimes help. It can bring a little bit of closure and help people to start moving forward. I think for all of us that was a good experience and a positive way to finally say, "Okay, well we got through the first year and let's move on now."

JOHNSON: One question that we like to ask all the people that we interview about 9/11 is if there is one visual that you have that you think will stick in your mind no matter how much time passes—about 9/11—what would that be?

LYKES: Looking out the window of the Clerk's Office. It looks down the Mall and we have a beautiful view. I always thought that was so amazing even after all the years that I worked there. An incredible view. Unfortunately, although you couldn't see the Pentagon, you could see the black smoke. I remember before we were told to run, but after the plane had hit the Pentagon, we looked out the window and it was such a horrible view—10 years later.

JOHNSON: Well it's a perfect segue to the next question I wanted to ask. With the 10 years that have passed, do you have any different perspective on the events, specifically for you and then just the role that the House played after the attacks?

LYKES: Well, unfortunately, we've been at war for such a long time, I think that we've all changed because of that. Now we have wars on all levels, from the terrorists with backpacks to obviously Afghanistan and Iraq. But I think it is interesting that it seemed right afterwards that we were never going to be able to relax again. You know, I felt like we were going to always be on guard walking the halls. Always wary of loud noises. Always, the planes coming in at a different angle and thinking, "Oh, my gosh." And that does fade. I think you are aware of it but not overwhelming. You can't live walking around with that anxiety so that part is better. I think we all look to the future and hope for the future and realize that there have been tragedies in the past. I am sure people who were at Pearl Harbor thought they would never get past it. We remember it and we think it was terrible, but as a country we've moved on. I think that that's what we all hope—that it will be even longer before we have to worry about something like that again.

That would be great, but aware that you need to be careful and I think that that's something that I think people do. They notice backpacks. They notice leftover boxes. They notice things that you would have never seen before and I think they still notice that. I think they still report that. People leave things in the ladies' room and they call and they say, "There's something in here." Before 9/11 they would have turned it into lost and found and they weren't afraid of it. I think that's a difference that still stays with us.

JOHNSON: Looking back, is there anything that you wish that could be changed from the way the Clerk's office responded to 9/11 or the way the House responded

to 9/11?

LYKES: I don't think so. I think that if anything, it was great when partisanship went out the window. I had never seen that or felt that politically. Both sides, everyone was one. It was like the dream. Unfortunately, something tragic had to happen but we were all just Americans. We were all just patriots. We're not going to buckle, you know. Very stoic, and that was so great feeling everybody working together and everyone being on the same side. That, unfortunately, doesn't last. Out of something tragic that was such a positive thing. I wish there was some way that we could get a little bit of that back without having to go through another tragedy. People realizing that we really are supposed to work together as one.

JOHNSON: How long do you think that lasted for?

LYKES: Obviously, the first month or two it was intense and 100 percent. Not that long. Probably after the first of the year and when the war was going on. I think that it probably didn't last that long. It was nice while it lasted.

JOHNSON: Was there anything else that you wanted to add today that Farar or I didn't cover?

LYKES: No, I don't think. I think we're good.

JOHNSON: Okay. Thanks for coming in today.

NOTES

[1] Reference to the Joint Session on September 20, 2001, during which President George W. Bush addressed Congress about the terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001.