

**Jim Mills**

Senior Capitol Hill Producer, Fox News Channel

**Oral History Interview  
Final Edited Transcript**

June 17, 2011

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

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

## Citation Information

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

“Jim Mills Oral History Interview,” Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives (17 June 2011).

## Interviewer Biography

**Albin J. Kowalewski** is a Senior Historical Editor with the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives.

— JIM MILLS —  
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

**KOWALEWSKI:** Well, this is Abbie Kowalewski from the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. Today's date is June 17th, 2011, and I'm in the House Recording Studio, on the phone, with Jim Mills, former Capitol Hill producer for Fox News Channel. Mr. Mills, thank you for speaking with us today.

**MILLS:** It's a complete pleasure.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Oh great. I'm glad. I'd like to start with a pretty basic question about where you were on September 11th, and what you were doing?

**MILLS:** On September 11th, I was the Senior Capitol Hill producer for Fox News. I probably should back up and say, before working for Fox, I worked for C-SPAN as their first fully embedded Capitol Hill producer, which meant, basically, that when I went to work every morning, I'd go to work at the Capitol, and specifically in the Capitol building, and grew to love that building, and love it to this day. I left C-SPAN in '96 and joined with the then fledgling Fox News. So on September 11th, I was with Fox, and headed in a little before 9:00. Do you want me to keep going on that, Abbie, or do you want to—

**KOWALEWSKI:** Yes, sure.

**MILLS:** So I was driving in, and I come around, I come into DC on the, most people in DC know the RFK Stadium, so I was coming up East Capitol Street, along that way. It's a beautiful drive, especially in the fall, or the spring, and

beautiful foliage. And you come on East Capitol Street, and you're sort of looking, well you are looking directly into the Capitol. You can't quite see the dome, with all the foliage, until you get close. But for all of us in the TV business, we all, whether you're the highest anchor or the lowest producer, you all work for the assignment desk, so the first thing you do in the morning when you're getting close to work, or before work, is you call the assignment desk and find out—you've already made decisions as to where cameras are going to be for that day.

So we already made decisions on Monday, leading into Tuesday, September 11th, as to where cameras would be. Congress had been gone for their entire August break, and I guess they were back the week before. Not much was happening legislatively, but I remember the First Lady [Laura Bush] was going to be on Capitol Hill that day, and I remember there was going to be some dedication of, at least the, I guess the model of what was going to become the Capitol Visitor Center. I was sort of interested in that, but, primarily, the thing I was thinking, driving into work on September 11th, believe it or not, and I was not the only one, was Gary [Adrian] Condit.

The entire, I would guess, May, June, and July, Gary Condit was the number one news story coming off of Capitol Hill. A little bit of an editorial aside here, he basically, although as far as we know, had nothing to do with the murder of an intern, Chandra Levy. He had nothing to do with that as far as anybody knows, but he transformed himself into a murder suspect because he hadn't been cooperating with the police, and he wasn't meeting with the girl's parents, etc., etc. Long list of things. So we were consumed with the Gary Condit story.



And so Congress was gone the entire month of August, and I remember watching Gary Condit on with Connie Chung, late August, thinking okay, he's going to come clean with everything, and then we'll be done with this nonsensical, slow-motion car chase, all around the Capitol, looking for Gary Condit, trying to get a comment from him. And sure enough, he did the interview and did not fess up to anything. So, on that September 11th, I thought, here we go again. We've got to continue with our chase of Gary Condit, basically asking him, not "Are you a murderer?" But, "What do you know, what are you hearing, why aren't you talking to the police?"

So that's what I was thinking, and I was on the phone with my assignment desk, which is just two blocks from the Capitol building, 400 North Capitol, the same building C-SPAN is in. Lillian LeCroy and I were sharing notes, and she mentioned to me that a plane had hit the World Trade Center. And at the moment, I thought, and this will sound very callous, but I thought, well, we have already an interesting day, and that's really interesting. Because we all thought, small plane. Immediately, as a news guy, you thought, well, that's going to dominate everything because they're going to have pictures, so not much news is going to emanate from Capitol Hill that day that my network's going to care about because they're going to have the picture of this airplane hitting the World Trade Center. Again, we thought it was a small plane.

I must have been on the phone with her around 9:03 a.m. on East Capitol Street, and now I'm pretty close to the Capitol, and, in the background, while I'm on the phone with her, I hear an "Oh my God" and shrieks, and this is in the newsroom at Fox. And Lillian proceeded to tell me a second plane just hit, and I knew instinctively, as most news people did, that this was

more than just an interesting news story. We were under attack. I remember thinking that clearly as I was driving up East Capitol Street, now about a block from the Capitol building, we're under attack. Now I can see the Capitol dome, and I can't say that I then thought, "Oh my God, what would happen if a plane hit the dome?" But I do remember thinking my day's totally changed now. No one's going to care about Gary Condit today.

So I parked my car in the Rayburn Building, a little bit after 9:00, and, as I mentioned before, we have camera locations—interestingly enough, we had a camera in the crypt of the Capitol, which was the normal staging place where you would hang out if the House Intelligence Committee was going to have a meeting.<sup>1</sup> And indeed, they were meeting that day, and I am not particularly proud of this, but, on that morning, the reason we were there with the camera, outside in the crypt, outside the House Intelligence Committee, was because Gary Condit was a member of the Intelligence Committee, and that's sort of the way we lived in those days.

So I went and checked on that camera, not then to look for Gary Condit but to look for Porter [J.] Goss, or anybody in leadership, because now I'm in the building, it's after nine, we know two planes have hit. Does anybody know anything? At that point, there's one story that everybody cares about, the World Trade Center story. So you go into that day with all sorts of interesting questions on various topics, but now the one question is does anybody know anything? Who do you know on the Hill who's hearing anything, from any sources, anywhere, that can shed light on what has happened up in New York?

So I checked that camera and, basically, going around the building, just trying to get information: “What are you hearing?” And, to be honest with you, nobody really knew anything. Everybody was at that point, I guess, just watching the television pictures out of New York of smoke and flames coming out of the World Trade Center. And so, another aside, I should mention that if you’re a beat reporter, or a producer like I was, you don’t have the total picture on anything, you have your little snippet. A lot of times, people at home watching on television, or are in an office watching television, know a lot more about what’s happening in the world than you do because you’re in a hallway or in the basement of the Capitol or just outside the Capitol, just trying to get whatever elements of information or video or audio you can. So sometimes you don’t have the big picture.

So I’m basically checking all the traps, checking the cameras, trying to bump into leadership. Is anybody hearing anything? And, at some point, I wound up—and I should say, somewhere between 9:00 and 9:45, they had not yet called for an evacuation of the Capitol, so we were still allowed to roam around. I must have been outside the House steps, again, trying to find anybody who knows anything, and I looked over my shoulder, and I saw black, billowing smoke coming up, and I thought it was, all I knew was, it was over near like 395, black billowing smoke. It sort of looked to me like a tanker truck maybe had exploded. I didn’t know if that was related or not related to what was happening in New York, but, in any case, I called my assignment desk, and told them. I said, “I don’t know if this means anything, but there’s black smoke coming up from 395.” I didn’t know it was the Pentagon, but, at some point thereafter, we identified—not me, other people—that the Pentagon had been hit by the third flight.

I quickly went back inside the building and got one of my camera guys, Rick Cockerham, and we went to the House Radio-Television Gallery.<sup>2</sup> They have a thing called the small studio, where interviews normally take place, but this small studio has a window, facing out toward the Pentagon, and the great thing about the small studio is you can plug in there and be live. So we pointed the camera out the window, plugged in live, and provided the network with live video of the smoke coming up from the Pentagon. Now, again, I didn't know if it was the Pentagon, somebody determined that later. As I mentioned, we don't have the big picture a lot of the times. I'm just giving my network live smoke, and I don't know that this is plane number three. I didn't know if it was a bomb. You just giving people elements, and smarter people back in the bureau are piecing it all together.

I do remember, while we were providing that live signal of the smoke from the Pentagon, must have come over the loudspeakers, but all the Capitol Hill Police started coming through, telling us we had to evacuate, had to get out of the building. I had my TV producer hat on. I didn't really want to leave the building because I have this live picture. I asked my camera guy if he would leave his camera there and lock down that live shot before we were evacuated. Well, a camera guy, who's got, at the beginning of a long day, is not going to leave his camera locked in a building that he can't get to. So I called the network, I said, look, we have to get out of the building, we'll give you another minute of this, and then we have to disconnect. And that minute was very long because, at this point, we're thinking, okay, two planes hit the World Trade Center, my God, did another plane hit the Pentagon? And are there any other planes up there? We didn't know if we were on the front end of 20 attacks that day or—we didn't know. So that extra minute of providing live smoke, we got a little scared, and I remember, finally, the police just

basically yanking us out of there, and we all went, moving pretty fast, running out of the Capitol, down the marble stairwells. The House Radio-Television Gallery's on the third floor. So you go down the second floor, and then you're bumping into other people who are running out of the building.

So we're now out of the building, and we're just outside the Capitol near the Capitol steps. Although I was senior producer for Capitol Hill, I pretty much stayed on the House side. I had other people on the Senate side of the Capitol, so I was more of a House guy than a Senate guy, so I always thought in terms of the House. I stayed near the House steps, and, by then, someone must have told us the Pentagon had been hit. I don't know if they knew it was an airplane or not, but we now are outside the Capitol, and you start putting two and two together, and then there were a lot of rumors. The entire rumor mill going around.

I should also mention I cannot remember exactly what the state of technology was at that time. I knew we certainly had cell phones, and I believe some people had Blackberrys, maybe some congressional staffers, but I don't remember having a Blackberry. All I remember having was a beeper, where folks could beep me, and I would call them back on a cell phone, and also any events that the Radio-Television Gallery had going on—any news conferences or any changes on the legislative schedule—you would get that on your hip, on the beeper, but that's about it.

So now we're outside the Capitol. We're just trying to put two and two together, what's going on, and sure enough, Porter Goss, the Chairman of the Intelligence Committee, House Intelligence Committee, is now outside. So we have our camera, and there's an outside place we can go live from.

Again, as a TV producer, you're always thinking where can you get a live shot? And we quickly assembled a news conference with Porter Goss, Chairman of the Intelligence Committee. And we're standing there, just outside the House steps, talking to Mr. Goss, and he didn't know much more than us. If he did, he wasn't telling us, but you truly got the idea that he didn't know what was going on.

There was sort of a bit of chaos going on at that point, which was, I presume, they were evacuating the House office buildings also, so that means all of the offices, staffers, everybody's in transit, moving around, trying to get up with folks. I'm sure he had staffers who were looking for him, and now he's outside the Capitol. He's in front of cameras now, talking to us. I'm not sure who took that live or not. I don't remember his comments exactly, but I'm sure he said something to the effect that "Justice will be done," and "We'll get to the bottom of this," those sorts of comments. But there was nothing specific he was sharing with us that gave any light as to who the perpetrator was at the time.

In the middle of that news conference—I call it a news conference, it was an informal gaggle of people just hovering around him with cameras and notepads. While we were in the middle of that, I hear another—we all hear a loud boom, and I thought, "Oh my God, did something else blow up?" I never did figure out what that boom was, but it could have very well been a jet fighter speed barrier thing because, by now, there are fighter jets flying over Washington. We didn't know what was going on, in terms of grounding of regular airplanes, but we knew there were fighter jets over the Capitol, and it could have very well been that, but it got our attention because things were looking really ominous at that point.

We wrapped up with Porter Goss, and, soon thereafter, the police now are running toward us and other people because, initially, when they told us to evacuate the building, we evacuated the building. We got out of the Capitol, and, you know, we're obeying all the rules, but they didn't clear us off the Capitol grounds. Now they're running, telling us to run for our lives, a plane is headed for the Capitol. We didn't know what that meant, other than run for your life. And at some point, I was on the phone again with Lillian LeCroy, my assignment desk person, and she told me specifically—and you got to understand everybody's dealing with limited information—a plane is headed for the Capitol. That would have been Flight 93 that went down in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. So we all ran for our lives, and we ran across the Capitol grounds, across First Street, and I wound up on the corner of First and Independence, sort of catty-corner from the Cannon Building, and right in front of the Library of Congress, and that is basically where I spent the rest of the day, camped out, hunkered down, because it was the closest we could stay to the Capitol, according to the rules of the Capitol Police at that point.

It didn't occur to us that if a plane indeed was headed to the Capitol, and was headed for the Capitol dome, which you would think it would have gone into the Capitol dome, and not the Cannon Office Building, but you never know. But no matter how accurate a nefarious hijacker would have been, it could have very well hit the Library of Congress. We had this false sense of safety being on First and Independence, which was kind of crazy, but we didn't really know what we were dealing with, in terms of the context of the day or the magnitude of the attacks or anything.

And that's where I stayed, outside the Library of Congress, on that corner, total chaos, sirens, roads are blocked, staffers are—a lot of Hill staff went

home. Some went to any townhouses somebody might have had on Capitol Hill, others went up Pennsylvania Avenue, towards some of the bars, and the coffee shops, to set up sort of an office in transit. Some Members of Congress went to coffee shops. You got the idea that there was no big plan in place for where they were supposed to go during a catastrophic event. That stuff came later, but, at the time, it was total chaos, and I stayed where I was, basically because you couldn't really move anywhere else. Once you got planted like I was, you couldn't move up and down First Street. Police were checking everybody.

We got word that the Capitol Hill Police Headquarters over toward Union Station, I think it's on D Street, that became sort of a de facto briefing place for Members because Members were all looking for information, and somehow they got the word to go to the Capitol Hill Police, and there were some sort of briefings going on over there. And we would see Members of Congress coming back from there, and we'd try to get bits of information, and I'm sure they were not telling us everything they could have, but you did get the idea that nobody really knew what was going on.

So that's where I stayed. We had a cameraperson. My cameraperson had a radio, I believe, cell phones were not working that well. Maybe you made a call, and one out of 10 went through, something like that. It was not complete meltdown, but there was a lot of traffic.

I remember getting a phone call from a friend of mine, making sure I had gotten out of the Capitol because he was sitting in front of the television, and his name was Mark Corallo. He was later John [David] Ashcroft's—actually, he may have been John Ashcroft's, the Attorney General's communications



director at that time. He wanted to make sure I was out of the building, and he said something to me, like “That’s too bad about Barbara,” and I didn’t know what he meant. Again, I’m not near a television set, and I asked him, “What do you mean?” He said, Barbara Olson, a mutual friend of ours, was on the flight that went into the Pentagon. And my heart just sank. Barbara was a delightful, beautiful, smart—wicked smart—fun, Republican operative. She was more than that, she was a lawyer, and just a wonderful person.

And at that point, this news story that I was now covering became extremely personal because I thought “Those bastards,” and later on, I found out that a whole family of—a colleague of my wife was best friends with an entire family that was on that flight. I didn’t know that at the time, but I found out later. But the Barbara Olson part of the story—I mean a lot of people in Washington knew Barbara—but it took this big story, and it really personalized it, so, at that point, you don’t cease being a journalist, and you do what you’re supposed to do during the day, but you’re also thinking, my God, we’re all part of this story. We are all in this together. So there was a change that went on, from us just being spectators or reporters of a story to we are the story also. So it’s sort of a little epiphany I had at the time, and I guess I will stop there for a little bit, Abbie, and tell me if you need me to clarify anything.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Well, no, that’s—first, I’m sorry to hear about Barbara Olson, that’s terrible. But I have many questions to ask you now based on what you just said. I was hoping we could backtrack a little bit.

When you first went up to the [House] Press Gallery to get the shot of the Pentagon, what was the mood like there? Was it crowded? Was it empty?

We've spoken to Tina Tate in the past, and she provided some great information, and I'm curious to hear about your perspective there.<sup>3</sup>

**MILLS:**

I'm trying to remember. I was aware that—obviously, all my competitors were aware of the story. I should sort of do a little context here also, which is, I worked for Fox News—Fox News Channel, which is 24-hour cable. And there are a bunch of news people on the Hill, but my primary competitors were CNN and MSNBC. That's my immediate competitive group, and, more broadly, ABC, CBS. But my competitors at that point were Mike Viqueira of NBC—Mike is now at the White House for NBC—and Ted Barrett who is now on the Senate side now, but he's the producer for CNN. So I woke up every morning, worried about what those guys were getting because they were my number one competition, and I was theirs. It's sort of, we're all friends, and we would go out for drinks together, etc., but, in the course of a normal day, we're worried about where the other guy is—if Mike and I were together, and we didn't know where Ted was, we were worried, where's Ted? If Mike and Ted were together, and they didn't see me, what's Mills up to, etc.? That's sort of the context.

So, early on, when we went back into the Capitol to get that live feed, I'm not really worried about anybody else, I'm trying to be competitive, and I didn't know that this was a national onslaught, where we're all in this together, as I mentioned previously. My competitive juices are just going, so I'm not paying attention to anybody else. All I know was I got the idea that everybody else was running around, but the idea that I have a live picture of that smoke, that's sort of a—I'm talking as a total newsman here—I've got a proprietary thing there, and I'm not going out and broadcasting to everybody that I've got this live signal because that's something that I presumably have,

and nobody else has. So that's just the way you think as a news guy, apart from the fact that other people had live pictures of the Pentagon, White House crews, probably helicopters at that point, but, again, you don't know what you have as a news guy.

So I was aware that everybody else was running around trying to, number one, get information, but I didn't know anybody else knew that you could see that live picture like I had. So I was a little bit like a shark, with maybe some flesh in my teeth or something. I was not focused on what anybody else was doing, as much as what I was doing. I was aware that there was a general state of chaos out there. But we hadn't really put it together that we were not being bold or courageous or anything, staying in the Capitol. We hadn't really put it together that maybe the Capitol building was not a good place to be in at that point, and it had not yet occurred to me. Generally, you sort of knew we were under attack, and you think about the Capitol building as the most iconic building, possibly on the planet, certainly in the United States. Everybody knows what the Capitol looks like, so you would think a bad guy, if he wanted to make a statement, would try to go for the Capitol, but we didn't quite have that figured out, at that point.

Anyway, that was a long-winded answer to your question, but there was a general amount of chaos, people running around, but I was focused more on getting that live shot than anything.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Is there a reason you went out the East Front of the Capitol, instead of, say, south or west?

**MILLS:** That's a good question. I can't remember if they guided us that way. I can't remember exactly, but we always tended to go out the East Front, as a TV person, because you have some live TV capabilities. It's a dumb example, it's a sad example, but we had never really had anything catastrophic like that other than in July 24, 1998, is when Officers [John M.] Gibson and [Jacob J.] Chestnut [Jr.] were murdered. And that was out, and we went out to the East Front because that's where we can be live with our cameras and see the whole building. So it just sort of became a place you would always go. There were several doors leading out to the East Front, and you can do these sort of—the south doors, and the document doors—there are several doors headed out that way. I just can't remember if the police were guiding us to the East Front, but it would be like the normal evacuation route. It's like the hurricane evacuation route, where you can get more people headed out to the East Front, than you can through the south door. I don't know if they were blocking off. I would not go to the Senate side. I always hung on the House side, so that just seemed like a natural place to go.

**KOWALEWSKI:** So once you're outside, and you said you stopped at the corner of First and Independence, were you then in contact with any of your competitors or any other fellow journalists that you may not have been in competition with, per se, but knew?

**MILLS:** Yes, I'm sure there were other journalists out there. I was aware, again, I'm a patriot first and foremost, more than a journalist or anything else, so I think by the time we were out there on First and Independence, we realized there is no more competition. Today, competition is done for today because everybody's in the middle of a huge news story, and there's very little that I'm

going to have exclusively on that corner, so, at that point, you share information.

I do remember my colleague, Ted Barrett of CNN. I don't know if this is through cell phone, or maybe he was out there with me, but he took his camera further down East Capitol Street, and he wound up on the roof of a building next to the Lutheran Church—I believe this is right—and he was able to get a live truck, or some live capability, to where they were in an elevated position. That bothered me because I didn't have that at the time. But to let my network off the hook, we didn't really need it because Fox News is right across from the Capitol, and they have a live shot of the dome from their studios. CNN didn't have that, so Ted was providing that picture for his network. There are all kind of print people.

You did get the idea that nobody knew anything, that's what you basically knew, and you did get the idea that folks sitting somewhere, at home or anywhere else, watching television knew a hell of a lot more about the situation than you did, and that was kind of frustrating.

I'm sure I called my wife to let her know I was okay, but that was the last I talked to her all day. By then, you go think about the personal things. I told you about Barbara Olson. Now I knew that my son—well, all of the schools were being closed, and that this was a major, major deal, and it wasn't just running around on Capitol Hill. I mean this was a huge story at the time.

But once I was hunkered down on First and Independence, basically the only value I had for being there, at that point, was Members of Congress who were coming back and forth from Capitol Police headquarters. You would

get little bits of information. Sometimes bad information, but I remember talking to one Member—I won't mention his name—but he told me that they thought there was a fifth airplane up there. Well, I called my people and said—I guess this must have been after 10:00, and maybe like 11:00 in the morning—and I called my people, “A Member of Congress just came from a briefing at the Capitol Police, and he tells me there's a fifth airplane.” Well, that sort of was bad information. So sometimes you're putting bad information, but I wasn't the only one putting—I believe CNN was reporting that the Mall was on fire. I don't even know how you would set the Mall on fire. But there was another rumor out there that a bomb had gone off outside the State Department, I believe. So there were all kind of crazy rumors out there, and there was no judgment for or against. That's just the nature—normally, the first information you get—anything like this, and there's not much like this—is wrong, or not quite complete.

And so, that's basically what I did that day, just hung outside there and just tried to pass along good information, and occasionally I would get a little tidbit, and I would call it in, or if I couldn't get a phone call out, my camera person—I believe it was Anne Marie Willis at the time—she had a radio, and I could get information—she could radio into somebody in the bureau, another camera person or her base. The technical people have their own reporting system, and they can pass it along. So information was getting back, but in a situation like that, you were so aware of how crazed the assignment desk is, that unless you really have something good—and I think I probably had my wings clipped after that fifth airplane rumor, but you always like to source those things. A Member of Congress told me. I didn't make that up out of thin air.

**KOWALEWSKI:** So you pretty much just stayed outside for the rest of the day, which would have meant that you would have been in good position for the gathering on the steps later that night. Were you around for that?

**MILLS:** Yes. Actually, I was thinking about this earlier today. I don't remember leaving that place at the Library of Congress, even to go to the restroom anywhere. I just don't remember leaving that position. I'm not sure I could have. I guess I was afraid that if I left there, I certainly wasn't moving toward the Capitol, I have to move away from the Capitol. And as chaotic as the situation was, I was worried that if I moved further east, that I wouldn't be able to get back to where I was, so I stayed there.

At some point, others maybe can give you the exact time, when we were allowed—after the plane went down in Shanksville, there must have been a couple hours of—I mean obviously, they grounded all flights, so we know now that there's nothing flying except military aircraft, so we had control of the skies. We knew that there wouldn't be any more airplane attacks. You sort of had the sense, I'd hate to say there was a calm about it, but you had the sense that there would be no more airplane attacks, that's all we knew. We didn't know, however, if those four plane attacks was the hors d'oeuvre of a bigger thing to come later that night or the next day. You had no idea how big this thing was going to be, but in terms of airplanes hitting the Capitol, we started relaxing a little bit at that point.

So I'm going to say, I'm going to say around middle of the afternoon, 3:00 or 4:00, the police let us go back into the building to get some of our stuff, meaning, if you drove to work that day, maybe you left your car keys in there. I'll fast forward the tape here a little bit and tell you, subsequent to all

this, we have all worked out like Go Bags things you have to grab in an emergency, but at that point, we never—I'm sure I went into the office that morning, threw my keys down, maybe even my wallet, can't remember, and just left the building. Now, whenever you go to work, you always are thinking, "What do I need to do if we're evacuated from this building?" So we went in, and I remember quick popping in—I think they let us in for like 10 or 15 minutes, and I quick popped some VHS tapes, and some machines, and start recording my network and some other networks, just so I would have a record of what happened that day because, again, I don't think I ever saw the video of the Towers coming down until later that evening. We were out on that corner, or running around, and knew it happened, but never saw it like most people did back home or in their offices.

So we got some stuff out of the Capitol, and they kicked us back out, but I'm not sure they made us go all the way back to First [Street]. I think, maybe, now I was over sort of near the Cannon Building, and I do remember now, we must have spent a couple hours outside the Capitol, but not as far away as we were. I'm guessing, a little bit around like 7:00 or 7:15, no earlier, like 6:00 or 6:30, the word started going forth that Members of Congress would be meeting on the Capitol steps. So, at some point, they let us over there, and, of course, you had to have a live picture of that, so we, I remember carrying a big reel of cable, it's a long cable run. Again, I've got my TV hat on, but that's why we're there, to provide pictures and sound, so we all wired to the House steps, wired our cable, so we can have live signal. What I was saying before about competitiveness, that was way beyond, that's behind us. Everybody in America deserves to see that, and I want my competitors to get that live shot too. So I remember helping another competitor get his cable in place. At some point, there's a sea change in your thinking, realizing this is



bigger than CNN versus Fox. This is something way beyond that. So we were all in it together at that point.

So I was at the steps, when, as I remember, a lot of Members came down the steps, probably, I don't know how many there were, 100 at least, and off to the side was leadership, like Denny [John Dennis] Hastert, Tom [Thomas Andrew] Daschle. I remember seeing Dick [Richard Andrew] Gephardt. I'm not an expert on this, and maybe you've already gotten this—but there's a whole catastrophe plan for the leadership, where they, I won't tell you what I know about that because I don't know what's there, but they remove the leadership separately, and they go other places. They're not going to Capitol Hill headquarters of the police; they're going off to their secret locations. So those folks were now back at the base of the steps. The Members were on the steps, and so there was a news conference right on the steps of the Capitol—Denny Hastert and Tom Daschle spoke. And it wasn't a news conference because I don't remember anybody asking questions. It was them making statements. It's kind of interesting, now that I think about it, I don't remember us asking any questions. But Hastert spoke, Denny Hastert spoke, Speaker of the House; Tom Daschle, who was then Senate Majority Leader, spoke. And I remember Hastert specifically mentioning that we're all in this together, and I remember Daschle making the comment—and I think it's the first time we heard this—that the House and Senate would be in session tomorrow, meaning Wednesday. And that was big news because there was quite a bit of discussion going on as to what the official congressional reaction should be. Should they close down? But they decided to stay in session as a signal to the American people that life goes on, and we're not going to rest because the business, basically, were resolutions condemning the acts of terrorism. So we learned that.

So you started getting the sense from that news conference, with these 100 Members or so, that we were going to get through this. We had no idea if Wednesday was going to bring a new round of attacks or not, but you sort of got the sense that through all the chaos, and police sirens of the day, and the running around, and run for your life, that there was some sense of order. And there's the congressional leadership and the Members of Congress, and we're going to live to fight another day. So they wrapped up—and I don't know if this was the brainchild of some staffer or if it was spontaneous, and I almost don't care—but we were basically starting to turn our cameras off, and we started hearing “God Bless America.” And it wasn't like Hastert or Daschle said, “Now we're going to all spontaneously sing a patriotic tune.” It just sort of emanated from the middle. And it was, of all my time on Capitol Hill, it was a real moment.

There was nothing pretentious about it. I remember looking up into that crowd, and there was Hillary [Rodham] Clinton just a few feet away from Bob Barr. Now, if you don't follow politics, you may not know that there is quite a difference in ideological thinking between Bob Barr and Hillary Clinton, who was then a Senator. And to see them standing there, side by side, singing “God Bless America,” that gets your attention. You did come away thinking, apart from sometimes the trivial and the ideological talking points in all of the normal back-and-forth, which has to happen, will happen, because that's a part of our system, that push comes to shove, if our back is up against the wall, that we're all going to be in it together. And that's exactly what the American people needed to see and hear, and it was real.

I think that got through to the people, and so back to our little job of television producing and providing live signals, you felt pretty good that you were a party to being able to provide that moment for those across the country and around the world for that matter.

**KOWALEWSKI:** So, after that conference, did you finally get a chance to go home?

**MILLS:** Let's see what happened then—I presume they let us go back in the building at that point. I should remember if I went up the avenue to have a libation with a colleague. We would sometimes share notes, but, by now, I guess it's like 8:00, we had to take the cameras down. There was another hour's worth of work, probably went inside, and I think I stayed in the Capitol for another couple hours, just to make sure. I'm a little foggy on that part of it, but I think they let us go back in the Capitol, and I'm pretty sure I stayed in there for another hour or so, and then took off for the evening.

And, interestingly enough, I remember being home late that night, and, of course, you hug your wife, and you hug your child, and I remember, I think we all just sort of held onto one another. By then, my son, who was probably in kindergarten or first grade, knew something was up. You know, "Why is there no school tomorrow?" sort of thing, and you have to explain, "There's bad guys out there, but everything's fine." You make up most of this stuff because you don't know if everything's fine. I was thinking about anybody who had to go to work on Wednesday, those folks in particular who worked in high-rises because the horror—I mean, at that point, I guess we knew that 3,000 of our countrymen—I guess they were still looking for folks. Remember, they had signs, people were looking for family members. So I think we were still in the middle of the false expectation that there would be

survivors, a lot of survivors from the World Trade Center, and it didn't happen.

So, at some point that night, I'm home, it's like midnight, I'm in bed, and I wake up around three in the morning, and I realize that—I had just, along with my TV producing, I had been writing columns. I wrote some for *National Journal*, cloakroom.com, and I just signed on with rollcall.com—and this was just a little side thing I did. And my first deadline for rollcall.com was September 12th, and it like, you know how you wake up in the middle of the night, with like, “Oh my God,” one of those “Oh my God.” I had to get out of bed and write a column, and, of course, what are you going to write about? And I was writing humor columns. I'm supposed to be snitty and sarcastic and hip and irreverent and all that stuff. Well, that's September 12th, that's not what anybody needs. So I had to get up and write a column and file that on early Wednesday morning. And then back to the Hill for the rest of the day. So interesting times, for sure.

**KOWALEWSKI:** What was it like on the Hill, on the 12th? What was the mood?

**MILLS:** I think, everybody had a renewed sobriety about—sometimes you go to work, especially folks around Capitol Hill, they may not, they don't think in terms of the Constitution every day. I don't mean that as a besmirchment of any kind. I just mean, people are just doing their jobs, and they don't think about it in the context of, especially in journalism—and journalism is in the Constitution. A free people need a free press to provide information. And to have spent May, June, July, a good part of August, and potentially September running around, looking for Gary Condit, to track him down, to try to ask him questions about what he knew about the missing intern, that all sort of, I

don't want to say it completely went away, but it really sobered us up. It was kind of a rebuke, in a way, to think about. We were not hovering outside the Intelligence Committee, nobody was, on September 11th. I couldn't even tell you the topic. They could have been talking about terror threats, for all I know. We weren't there for terror threats, we were there because Gary Condit was on that committee. So, on September 12th, I think we all had a renewed sense of, we better keep our ears open and eyes open for those things that are really important because the American people depend on that, and I just think we sort of woke up a little bit, that we were in for some serious days ahead, if not any more immediate attacks, at least the world as we knew it was going to change.

Obviously, there were changes in security, around the Capitol. Things became much more circumspect. You couldn't sort of bounce around the Capitol as freely as you had. I guess they kicked the tourists out for, I can't remember now, but it seems to me they—I think maybe they opened it up by the weekend, for the tourists—I just can't remember. You may know that, but you sort of got the sense that the world was changing, and that we would never go back. I mean, commercial flights were still not flying. The only airplanes up in the air were military jets, and that was kind of spooky. I remember that. I remember waking up that morning and going out for the morning paper. Of course, you want to see how the *Washington Post* is going to report on this and hearing the military jets. And I remember that weekend, I believe that weekend my wife and I, and child, went down to Rehoboth Beach because it had been a hellacious week. [It was] very odd to not see any airplanes flying anywhere.

I think everybody had that same sort of feeling that week on Capitol Hill, which was—I think we were all a little bit numb. Because, you know, I don't want to make it into a jokey thing, but it's sort of funny, in a way, which is anybody who works on Capitol Hill, as a journalist for instance, think that what they do is much more important than the journalists who are working at the White House. There's this sort of unwritten competition that those of us who work on Capitol Hill think what we do is more important, and people who work at the White House think what they do is more important. So, in an odd way now, it started to hit us that we were very close to getting hit with the flight that the heroes took down in Shanksville. And those of us at the Capitol, of course, were convinced that the plane was headed toward the Capitol, and I think folks who worked at the White House were convinced it was headed to the White House. I don't know that we know. But you sort of got the idea that that competition still existed, which was a good thing, because it sort of let you know that life was going to get back on track, and we'd be able to laugh and smile again at some point.

But that week was not a week of joking. It was pretty circumspect and sober. And I think we all, all went about our jobs with a little bit more, not that we weren't going to track down some trivial things here and there, but I think, primarily, we wouldn't do it as a natural thing. We would have to be convinced that it's worth tracking down that story because we were in for going after the bad guys, meaning legislatively. They created the entire Department of Homeland Security. They had all the hearings on 9/11. So there was a lot of legislative activity that had to be paid attention to. All the families, the 9/11 families. So there were some real serious things coming down the pike that I think we were all aware that we had to get serious about.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Did 9/11 change your access to the Members themselves?

**MILLS:** I'm thinking it did with leadership. I think it's probably a two-part answer, which is immediately, yes, but then I think the police backed off a little bit, realizing—there's a bit of an adversarial relationship, obviously there is, between the press and Members of Congress, with a small "a." Doesn't mean we wake up every morning thinking they're the enemy, but it's an adversarial relationship, and there's somewhat of an adversarial relationship between the members of the press corps and the police because we want unfettered access everywhere, because we're in the Constitution for God's sake, and we need to have access to Members of Congress for the American people. That's our high argument. And the police, of course, have to protect Members and have to protect the building. So, somewhere in there, there's a compromise that's etched out, and I think we got back to a more normal place on that.

I do remember though, I don't know if this is where you want to go also, but—obviously we can talk about anthrax and stuff if you want—but further down the road, I don't know exactly when this happened, maybe you can tell me, during the Ronald Reagan funeral, which was 2002, 2003? Whenever that was. The governor—or a lot of people were flying into the city for the Ronald Reagan funeral, and the Governor of Kentucky, former House Member Ernie [Ernest L.] Fletcher, his airplane—I'm not blaming him—his airplane violated airspace over DC, and we had numerous incidents like this. We were told to run for our lives. Now, having lived through 9/11, we knew what that meant. On 9/11, we didn't know really what that meant. It was conceptual, theoretical. But after 9/11, anytime somebody said run for your life, we ran for our lives. And that happened on the day that Ronald Reagan's

casket was going to be in the Capitol building. This plane violated air space, and we were all running out of the Capitol, running for our lives.

So that part of life really got your attention because that must have happened three or four times after 9/11, and you get scared. I mean, you are scared. You're permanently scared. I'm sure other people have had nightmares about the Capitol, and I can't look at the Capitol dome now. And I hate to say this because it's not an image that I want in my brain, but I always see an airplane going because that's what could have happened. I am forever the enemy of my enemies for taking down 3,000 of my countrymen, but also for planting that seed in my head, of the beautiful Capitol dome—which I love—to not be able to look at it quite the same way is a horrible thing.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Did you cover the Joint Session on the 20th? Because that was really the next big event to happen after.

**MILLS:** Yes, I was there. It's funny, you have States of the Union, and you have foreign leaders come and give speeches at various times, and when you're a news producer, or a journalist on Capitol Hill, you don't necessarily have to be in the chamber because once you're in the chamber, you're sort of limited. You don't have a laptop. So it's sometimes better to be outside the chamber, in the Capitol building, but outside the chamber. But on that day, we all fought to get in the chamber itself because we knew it was a moment that we wanted to share, primarily as Americans, and, obviously, to see with our own eyes. Because we knew this was going to be—to have been in the Capitol, if you're of age, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared war on the Japanese [in 1941]—I couldn't think of anything more, or anything similar than that, but on September 20th, when [President] George [W.] Bush came up. We



basically, as a people, and even journalists—journalists are people too, and they are patriots—we were all in there together, as Americans, I remember. We needed that. We needed to come together and realize that we have enemies out there, and we all better be on our toes and be in it together.

**KOWALEWSKI:** How do you think 9/11 changed the political culture on the Hill, the way Members dealt with one another, the way their staffs dealt with one another, even the way committees with overlapping jurisdiction dealt with one another?

**MILLS:** That second part you added in there, that's a huge one. I want to say, initially, I went to many a news conference, when I doubt very seriously if Denny Hastert, Speaker of the House, and Dick Gephardt, Minority Leader at the time, had ever met before. They knew each other, of course, but they just didn't have meetings. They didn't have meetings. And during that period of time, you got the idea that they were—I meant Gephardt used to always say there's not any space between us, and I don't know what their personal feelings are for one another, but because they have so many differences ideologically and legislatively. But during that period of time, you did get the idea that there was a lot of working together, and I think that translated into the staff people working together, and there just wasn't the normal flack machine that would be cranking out press releases. We're back to that now, obviously, which is a healthy thing in a way because if we're into the normal, tear down your enemy sort of thing, over his views on Social Security or Medicare or whatever, then that's almost a counterintuitive sign that things are okay, and we're back to what we're supposed to be doing, which is bitching and moaning about each other's policies, and, hopefully, to the collective good, all making it a more perfect union, which is what we're in

business to do as people in a free democracy. But, for a period there, I think there was like a moratorium on anything that smacked on partisanship or sniping.

Now, on the other part of your question, I do remember that there was a pretty huge debate going on as to what went wrong, in terms of the FBI, the CIA, the intelligence communities. Because we knew about Osama Bin Laden, and we apparently knew that there were plans afoot to use airplanes, and we knew guys were taking training to learn how to fly an airplane, but not land it. I mean, all these little bits that we now learned. So information was not being shared as expeditiously as it could have, we all knew that. So then the argument became, “Do you want a Homeland Security Department?” And there was a huge debate on that. And I’m not even sure it went down party lines, I guess it did too, but I do remember that George [W.] Bush, I believe, opposed that to start with. But I think Congress had its way, and they created the Department of Homeland Security, which was sort of ironic because it’s a huge agency which was created during a Republican Congress.

But I think once the gears were in motion to create that, that changed a lot on Capitol Hill because everybody on Capitol Hill, if you have sort of a set committee structure, you sort of know who you’re supposed to be talking to in the agencies. When you create a huge, big new agency, and now, just to get a little parochial, Members of Congress have to figure out who they know in the Department of Homeland Security. Anyway, so there were a couple years of going through that process, of trying to figure out how that new agency was going to relate to Capitol Hill. And so I know that happened, and obviously there were hearings on 9/11, and then eventually *The 9/11*

*Commission Report* came out, and there was enough sin on everybody's plate, to use a little bit of a theological metaphor.<sup>4</sup> I mean all of the agencies, everybody, I mean not just the agencies, but everybody dropped the ball on some level, and hopefully we've learned our lessons.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Well, it's interesting that you mentioned *The 9/11 Commission Report* because that was my next question. But I was hoping I can kind of step back and take somewhat of a broader view here about the journalism profession in general. How do you think 9/11 changed the way you went about your job and the way your colleagues go about their jobs?

**MILLS:** I think, the most profound part—I think the most profound thing that happened with 9/11, and those in journalism, and I, again, refer back to the Gary Condit matter—there are stories that need to be chased out there, and some consider them trivial stories, and I'll leave that to the judgment. We're in the middle of one now with Anthony [D.] Weiner, and he's resigned from Congress, so we're covering that story, obviously. American people care about the story, but I think that most journalists who covered that period of time have changed their radar meters a little bit to where they realize—they knew conceptually that they're Americans, and they're patriots, but I think it really brought that to the fore, and I hope that hasn't gone back. It's been almost 10 years now, and I hope people haven't fallen back on that.

Back on the Capitol steps, I remember journalists crying and applauding at the end of the event. And I for one joined in the singing of "God Bless America." It's almost hard to imagine, but it did not seem "fakey." It was a real moment, and I think that there was real patriotism, there was real feeling for my fellow colleagues on the Hill, staffers and Members of Congress,

that—it's a cliché to say that we're all in this together, but there's no other way to say it.

Journalism is not just a profession that sits on the side, it's a valuable tool that a free people need, but you can never—I'm not talking about wearing flag pins or that kind of thing. I don't care whether somebody does or doesn't, but ultimately what you're doing as a profession is not just to tear down somebody, but you're responsible for helping make this a more perfect union too, as a journalist. I think any of us who covered that period of time are, we're much more attuned to that, and I hope that hasn't changed.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Did 9/11 affect your relationship with the assignment bureau over at Fox at all? Were you given more leeway? Did you have a lot of leeway to begin with, kind of pursued the stories that you wanted?

**MILLS:** Well, I'll tell you one thing that happened after that is we got real specific in terms of what happens if you get evacuated from a building—number one, what kind of backup plans do you have? Where do you go? But there was a downside to it, too, which is because we were all evacuated, and we all lived through 9/11, some things become news stories that shouldn't have become news stories.

I don't know if you remember or not, but after 9/11, for several years there, I remember once being with a colleague of mine, Major Garrett, and I guess Trish Turner, who is the Senate producer for Fox. We were covering a news conference over in the Rayburn Building. I think it was a Judiciary Committee news conference. And then, after the news conference, we all went down to the snack bar for a cup of coffee. There was a security event

where the building was sealed down, and, as it turned out, a Member of Congress, and I forgot his name, probably just as well, somebody who had served in the military, who knew the sound of shots, of rifle fire, reported that there had been rifle shots in the basement of the Rayburn Building. So if “Joe Blow” had said that, it would be one thing, but you have a Member of Congress who knows his way around guns. There have been shots fired in the Rayburn Building. So the Rayburn Building is sealed off. SWAT teams are going through. We are on the phone with our assignment desk, getting back to your original question. So now this a live news story, all across America. We’re locked in the building, we can’t get out, but we put Major Garrett on the air with a cell phone reporting on what he was seeing, and he’s seeing SWAT men go through the building. We have a live picture outside the building. The nation, people all across the country are looking at the lockdown at the Rayburn Building. Shots have rung out in the Rayburn Building, and the story was a complete fraud. This is several hours of network, and I’m sure CNN was doing the same thing, and other networks were. I don’t know that they ever got to the bottom of what it was, but what we think it was was major a forklift going over a rumble strip. It was not gunshots, and it was just a noise that a Congressman determined were gunshots.

So, post-9/11, whenever you have anything in that category, you tend to go overboard. There was another incident—I just call him the suitcase guy because there’s a guy who came up on the West Side of the Capitol, and I believe he had a suitcase on either side of him, and we, presumably, I guess there was some information that he had left, and he was going to blow the building up, etc. Turned out he didn’t have anything, but that was a live news story. Cars that are found on the Mall—could be some guy driving up

from West Virginia, who has his shotgun. So there were multiple events like that, to where we would go crazy trying to provide live signals and put that on the air because I guess you don't know which one is going to pan out as the real one. You think they're all real until proven otherwise.

We've had, I forget the exact term for it, but where they can fire something, it's not like a water cannon or whatever, but they can disrupt, I think they call it a disruption. If the car's left unattended, and they think there might be some bad things in there, they can disrupt the car. Not blow it up, but cause enough motion to, if anything is going to blow up, it will, etc. So we must have had a dozen of those sorts of things post-9/11, that, looking back, maybe we went overboard because we didn't want to miss the next 9/11. I speak just as a journalist here.

### **END OF PART ONE ~ BEGINNING OF PART TWO**

**KOWALEWSKI:** Was there anything else you wanted to add about 9/11 in particular?

**MILLS:** Are we going to talk at all about anthrax?

**KOWALEWSKI:** Yes, if you want to, we can try—

**MILLS:** How long have I gone? How long have we gone here?

**KOWALEWSKI:** 73 minutes.

**MILLS:** My, I can yak, can't I?

**KOWALEWSKI:** Yea, absolutely.

**MILLS:** Hang on, let me just look at my little yellow notes here. Got that, got that, they're all going away. Got that, got that, talked about that, talked about that. Well, you can just ask me a generic anthrax question, and I'll tell you what I remember, and I'm probably done.

But there is one thing, before the anthrax, I believe this was before the anthrax, in October. I don't know if you remember it or not, but there was a tornado out on the West Front, and I remember thinking, this probably won't factor into anything, but there was literally a funnel cloud like one month after 9/11. And I started thinking, and it was like on the Mall, it was coming across the Mall. I thought, if that thing hits the Capitol dome, that's all that Osama's going to need. God reached down from the heavens to wipe out the American Capitol—anyway, that was just a little sidebar story. But I remember calling that in, there's a funnel cloud over the Capitol, over the Mall, and, actually, the tornado did actually hit down in College Park, Maryland, and caused a lot of damage over there.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Yeah, I remember that.

**MILLS:** So, that's just something I had in my notes. I don't care if you need that or not, but sorry about that.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Oh, it's okay.

**MILLS:** So you're going to get me into anthrax, if you want.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Yes. Well, let's talk a little bit about anthrax before we go. Were you following the case at all, prior to October 15th? Because, at that point, journalists were being targeted. There was a death in Florida, and then there was the envelope sent to, I believe, Tom Brokaw's office in New York.

**MILLS:** Yes, I remember that. Not really, I didn't think about it. Did we know at the time if it was really anthrax?

**KOWALEWSKI:** I believe they knew that the photography editor in Florida had indeed died of anthrax poisoning, yes.

**MILLS:** Right, exactly, yeah. God, the horror of that, just so close, and that was in October, that was like a month later, right?

**KOWALEWSKI:** October 15th.

**MILLS:** And when did the letters show up in Tom Daschle's office? When was that, do you know that?

**KOWALEWSKI:** Excuse me, that was when Tom Daschle's office opened the letter, on October 15th. The prior incidents I believe happened on the first week of October.

**MILLS:** Right. Yes, I mean, until it happened in Senator Daschle's office, I really, I didn't have any particular connection to it on Capitol Hill, so I really didn't know what to make of that. I'm trying to remember what I remembered at



the time, in terms of did I think it was the bad guys, or just somehow, I sort of thought it was a whack job out there doing whatever. But then, when it hit Capitol Hill, it's like, "Oh jeez, here we go, just what we need," so close to 9/11.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Well, where were you when you first heard about it?

**MILLS:** Again, I'm more of a House guy, so I hang on the House side. So tell me, was Daschle's office in the Hart Building?

**KOWALEWSKI:** Yes.

**MILLS:** Yes, okay. So I was the senior producer on the Hill, so I was in charge of all the cameras on the Hill. I remember sending a camera guy over to the Hart Building, if you can believe it, and I actually went over there, I remember now, and came back. I just can't remember all the details, but here's the thing. In terms of how they dealt with the anthrax thing, there was actually a little bit of a news conference, they called the news conference in the Hart Building. So, and I'm not blaming Capitol Hill Police or anybody because they were all learning as they went on this one, which was—so a lot of folks in the media, and I was not at this particular news conference, went to the Hart Building, they were outside, in non-anthraxed [area] outside, going into the Hart Building. And then they had the news conference, and then, at some point, somebody said, "You know what, maybe that's not the brightest thing." So all those folks had to start getting on cipro—all the folks who were actually at that news conference.

And then, they even got worse than that, which was, and there were a couple other stories, this may have been the Daschle office still, but it seems to me they took all—they cleared out Daschle’s office, and I guess they were doing all the testing of staffer clothing and all that stuff that was left behind, and they literally took that stuff into the Capitol building, into the LBJ Room, over on the Senate side.<sup>5</sup>

So now you’ve got this incongruous situation where they’re taking the clothing that was in, I think it was the Daschle office because we had some other scares over there, but, in any case, this suspect office, the remaining clothing that they had to test, they were literally taking it closer to the Capitol, into the Capitol building itself, and then we got into a situation where somebody said, “Well, maybe that was not the smartest thing to do.” At that point, we started seeing folks, what I call “moon men,” the hazardous waste, and that became a big story for us. Every time you were turning around, there was another group of “moon men,” who were decontaminating this, and that was a huge story. And it happened a couple times over on the House side, where they closed down an office, and they sealed up an office, but I don’t think they ever completely closed down a building. I think they figured they could somehow isolate it. Did they completely clear the Hart Building for a period of time?

**KOWALEWSKI:** Yes, at one point, they had to release chlorine gas into the building in order to kill the spores because they found spores in both the fifth and the sixth floors.

**MILLS:** Right, right. See I had forgotten all that. I’m probably not going to be too helpful on this because I’ve forgotten a lot of the details. So they cleared the

entire building. And then, subsequent to that, on the House side, they found some, I don't know if they found some real stuff, or they were suspicious, or some mystery letters had come in or something. But I don't think they ever—tell me if I'm wrong, I'm sorry if I'm not helpful in this—but I don't think they ever completely shut down any of the House buildings.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Well, they found a lot in the mail rooms, and I believe, well, I know that the mail room for the House is in the Ford Building, and I believe the mail room for the Senate is in the Russell Building, and they found a significant amount of anthrax in the Ford mail room, so they had to clean that section as well. But there was some controversy about whether or not to shut both branches down.

**MILLS:** Well, actually, I do have something on that. I don't know if you remember it or not. So we've gone through 9/11, and everybody was together, etc. So, when the anthrax thing came up, I mentioned Tom Daschle on the House steps, saying the House and Senate would be in tomorrow, and everybody was on board with that. So, after the anthrax, the Senate and the House took different approaches to it. And the Senate said that they would be in, and I can't remember the exact timing, but Speaker Hastert decided they would close the House down for a week. You may correct me on this—and there was actually, on the cover of the *New York Post*—had a picture of, I want to say Denny Hastert and Dick Gephardt, with the title, big bold letters, “Wimps.” And the media had gotten into this that Tom Daschle and company on the Senate side were being bold and brave by keeping the Senate in, and the House folks were wimps because they didn't want to be around that stuff.

And as it turned out, it was probably the right decision because we were making bad decisions as to who can be exposed, where, etc., and we didn't actually know what we were dealing with. So, as it turned out, I think the House folks were vindicated. It's sort of a weird story also on how the Senate and the House approach things differently because I do remember there was a period of time where there was like one of these moon walker, like something out of the movie *Outbreak*, with Dustin Hoffman, sort of like one of those tunnels. I believe it was like on the third floor of the Capitol, where the House—trying to think—you can walk from the Senate side to the House, but you couldn't walk from the House side to the Senate. But anyway, there was a real disconnect, and you got the idea that they weren't all out of the same hymn book on this particular issue.

But, again, I think folks were learning as they went, and that was just another example of until you go through something for the first time, you don't really know what the protocol should be. And that was being played out on the national stage, and Hastert and company got beat up pretty bad, but I think they were ultimately vindicated on that. I'm sorry I'm having a hard time remembering a lot of the anthrax stuff.

**KOWALEWSKI:** That's all right. Most of it was contained onto the Senate side.

**MILLS:** But do you remember them bringing the clothes over to the LBJ Room?

**KOWALEWSKI:** I know that they transported clothes from the Senate office building to, I believe it was the Capitol because they needed to test those clothes as well, for a second time I believe. Yes.

**MILLS:** Right, but once they got the stuff in there, then they had to totally decontaminate the LBJ Room. The LBJ Room's up on the second floor or third floor—must be the second floor. I don't mean to throw stones, but they obviously made some mistakes in terms of how to deal with that stuff, initially. That was real early on, and then, eventually, they seemed to get smarter about it.

**KOWALEWSKI:** There was the sense that people didn't know how potent this form of anthrax was until much later into the crisis. They didn't realize that it was so finely milled that it could actually seep through the pores of a closed envelope. So, there was—

**MILLS:** Right, right, yes. I should have done some more homework on that, but that part of life for me is kind of a blur. I just remember walking around the Capitol, and every time we saw moon suits and decontamination units, that was a big story for us, and we'd send a camera out there, and it just sort of perpetuated. I can't even remember now, to be honest with you, if we thought that this was connected to Al Qaeda at the time. I think we were all nervous about everything, so we assumed that it was just another, probably another way to get to us.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Along those same lines, and this is going to be my last question for today.

**MILLS:** I'm rambling, I'm done. You can tell.

**KOWALEWSKI:** {laughter} How did anthrax and, really, this increased security following the anthrax attacks, how did that affect your job as a journalist?

**MILLS:** Well, it's probably not the most important comment, but I do remember that we used to receive a fair amount of mail from the outside, to go right to the Capitol building, and I remember that ceased. There was a whole crazy—if you had something that needed to be sent to you, you needed to have it sent to your home or somewhere else, but don't send anything to the Capitol. I guess there were some high-tech ways they tried to do that, through some private enterprise, but I remember that was a practical—don't they test stuff now? Doesn't everything that's mailed to the Capitol go somewhere else for testing?

**KOWALEWSKI:** Yes, all of the mail's irradiated. It's sent through a radiation machine to kill whatever biological or chemical agents are maybe harbored in the mail.

**MILLS:** And we also did lose, we lost a couple folks in the DC Post Office too. You know, after 9/11, and after those it was almost like this is going to be a way of life for us, and you assumed that people are going to figure out the best way to protect you.

And, this is another natural thing, and I got caught in this a couple times myself—and I don't know if this was more 9/11-related or anthrax-related. But if you were ever at an event, and this would happen from tourists. Some tourist would set their bag down somewhere and leave it. And I guess the protocol then is to call the police, and they can cordon off a whole area, or indeed shut down a whole building based on the fact that somebody left their lunch behind. So we had several of those sorts of incidents. And this sort of filters into the gunshot incident, the non-gunshot incident in the Rayburn Building. We had a lot of false stories, but you don't know which one is true—that's going to be true, so you deal with all of them.

So, unfortunately, you're left in a situation where there's a lot of crying wolf out there. I just remember, for a period of time, I can think about, just about everywhere in the Capitol, where you couldn't go somewhere for a while because it was cordoned off because something was found. I remember there was something on a trash can up on Pennsylvania Avenue. There was something done at the bottom of the Hill on Independence Avenue. Just all over the place, there were always things being left behind, or cars unattended too, and you didn't know if that stuff was loaded with anthrax or bombs.

That's why I sort of conflate all the stories, which was anything left behind, it's got the potential of shutting down a building. So, sometimes, you would be at a news conference, for instance—this happened to me once—and I had just like a briefcase, and I left it behind, and about 10 minutes—normally pretty innocuous, you just go back to the room and get it. So I went back to the room, and, all of a sudden, I see police going toward the thing, and I quickly identified it. But if I had not identified it, that could have been an incident that I caused. Then, when you're with a TV operation, you have camera guys who leave stuff behind, and they've got equipment, and some of the stuff looks sort of “high-techy” so you're always worried about what you're leaving behind, that's going to communicate to somebody else that the bad guys have shown up.

**KOWALEWSKI:** Well, this has been great, Jim. Thank you so much for taking the time.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence.

<sup>2</sup> The House Radio-Television Correspondents' Gallery.

<sup>3</sup> The Office of the House Historian conducted an oral history interview with Tina Tate, <https://history.house.gov/Oral-History/People/Tina-Tate/>.

<sup>4</sup> National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 2004).

<sup>5</sup> The Lyndon Baines Johnson Room in the Capitol building.