

Zack Stanton
House Page

Oral History Interview
Final Edited Transcript
May 20, 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.

Citation Information

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

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Interviewer Biography

Kathleen Johnson is the Manager of Oral History for the Office of the Historian, U.S. House of Representatives. She earned a B.A. in history from Columbia University, where she also played basketball for four years, and holds two master's degrees from North Carolina State University in education and public history. In 2004, she helped to create the House's first oral history program, focusing on collecting the institutional memory of Members and staff. She co-authored two books: *Women in Congress: 1917–2006* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2006) and *Black Americans in Congress: 1870–2007* (GPO, 2008). Before joining the Office of the Historian, she worked as a high school history teacher and social studies curriculum consultant.

—ZACK STANTON—
SEPTEMBER 11, 2001

JOHNSON: This is Kathleen Johnson with the Office of the House Historian. The date is May 20, 2011, and today I'm here with Zack Stanton, a former Page, who is going to be discussing his memories of September 11, 2001, and the anthrax scare in October of 2001.

To start today, can you trace your personal memories of September 11, 2001, beginning that morning?

STANTON: Sure. Well, it's become somewhat cliché to say that that morning was like any other morning, but it really was, and for those of us in the Page program, it was just the beginning of our second week here in Washington, DC. And so all of us were 16 years old, really away from home for the first time and new to this whole world. We began that day kind of consumed by normal high school things. My best friend from the program, Xavier, he began the day with the intention of campaigning that day for student council president. And that is how the day began. Obviously, everything changed.

We were at school that morning—in the attic of the Library of Congress is where the Page School is—and we were getting off school at about—I can't place the time—8:30, 9:00, because the House was supposed to go into session early that day. And I noticed that there were a lot of Pages crowded around one of the secretaries' rooms in the attic, watching television as school was getting out. I didn't really think anything of it because it was not uncommon.

And then Xavier and I were crossing the street to go to the Capitol to work for the day, and one of our friends came up to us and said, "A plane ran into

the World Trade Center.” It seemed so absurd that both of us just dismissed it. We actually made fun of him for saying it, just because it seemed just so absurd. And then we went into the Capitol, dropped our backpacks off in the Page cloakroom in the basement, and then headed up to the floor of the House. I went back to the Democratic Cloakroom, and we were all there around a small little television screen that they have and we were just watching it all unfold. It was just so unreal to be there, to be 16 and be sort of in the center of all of it in a way, and just the gravity of everything began to sink in slowly.

JOHNSON: And as you mentioned, the House met early that day. They were in at 9:00 for morning debate, and then they recessed. Do you remember what was going on on the House Floor? Did you have an opportunity to leave the cloakroom and see what was happening?

STANTON: I remember that the House went into session very briefly. You know, they were still trying to get a hold of everything that was going on. I don't remember what was to be discussed that day. I think the next day we were supposed to have an address from the Australian Prime Minister [John Howard], and the week prior, we had had an address from President of Mexico, Vicente Fox. And I remember actually thinking at the time just how lucky, how lucky we were that the attacks didn't happen September 7th. If they had happened on the 7th and if things had gone differently, the very real possibility that we could have had a plane crash into the Capitol with a Joint Session going on.

But no, I don't entirely remember what the House was talking about that day. It's more sort of the gravity of everything that I remember. I remember just the wide mix of emotions everyone—the gradient of sadness that people

were really feeling, those who had family members in New York or were from New York. I believe there was one Page whose father worked at the World Trade Center.

And then mixed with all of that, there were all sorts of reports going on on the TV screen as we were watching. We heard reports that—initially they said it was a helicopter that had crashed at a landing pad at the Pentagon. There were reports that the National Mall was on fire, that a bomb had gone off at the State Department. It was sort of the sinking realization that we may very well be next. And it was just so surreal. There's no other word for it.

JOHNSON: When and how were the Pages told to evacuate the Capitol?

STANTON: Those of us that were working on the Democratic side, our work supervisor, Wren Ivester, she came to us and said that she wanted us to go home for the day and wanted us to stay together as a group and walk home and that she was going to lead us out of the building. And so we began to walk down—the House Chamber is on the second floor—began to walk down the internal stairway. And as we were going down from the second floor to the first floor, the alarm system went off. And at that point, people just began running.

JOHNSON: Can you describe the alarm system?

STANTON: Sure. As I remember it, it was a sort of a ringing bell sound, like, a typical high school bell class ending sound. And I remember—I personally remember running so fast outside that I remember thinking at the time that I couldn't feel my feet beneath me. It was just complete mayhem. We didn't know that it was—we assumed, obviously, it was an evacuation alarm, but, at the time, we didn't know. One of the difficult things with history is that it can be tough to remember that, that which seems like a foregone conclusion

in retrospect isn't that at the time. And so we didn't know that the Capitol wasn't going to end up being attacked that day, and so we thought there was a very real possibility that a plane was about to crash into the Capitol. I know I thought that, and I know other Pages that thought that. So we were just running for our lives, really.

JOHNSON: As you realized what was happening and the gravity of the situation, did you all head to the Page dorm at that point?

STANTON: We were all told to head back to the Page dorm. There were some Pages who were in the middle of doing a run and didn't entirely know what was happening. Obviously, crowds were pouring out of every House office building, and so there was just mayhem on the streets. And we could see the smoke, obviously, rising from the Pentagon not that far away. And we headed back to the Page dorm, which is a couple blocks away from the Capitol, and we were in lockdown there until they could get an accurate head count. That is where I think most of us in the Page program just kind of lost it. There was this huge national tragedy going on, and here we are, away from home for the first time, in our second week away, and we, in that moment, sort of became one another's family, really leaned on one another in that way as we would have had we been home with our actual families.

JOHNSON: And what happens once you arrived at the dorm?

STANTON: When we arrived at the dorm, we were all told to go into the dayroom and just wait until they could count heads. There were kids trying to call home on the cell phones, which weren't that widespread at the time, and they were just unable to get through. The circuits were obviously incredibly busy. We were all watching the big-screen TV that they had there, watching it all happen on CNN, and it was just people trying to comfort one another, some

people sobbing. I know I was sobbing, and one of my roommates put his arm around me, and that was atypical. That was happening with a lot of Pages, where there were some that were handling it better than others were. And eventually, we were able to go back to our dorm rooms and call home, and that was how that all played out.

JOHNSON: As they day progressed, who was keeping the Pages apprised of what was going on?

STANTON: Well, we were generally finding out about stuff just from watching television because, obviously, there were all sorts of considerations going on for the Clerk's Office and for the House in general. But the staff of the program was there to try and comfort us. The teachers from the Page School were even there. And I remember some of them were actually comforting and some not so much. There was one who—she was well-intentioned, but she said that she still expected us to do our homework for the next day of class and that she wanted us to think of it as “a snow day without the snow,” were the words that she used. And I'm sure she was well-intentioned, but, at the moment, and even in retrospect, it just seems kind of tone deaf.

JOHNSON: Did any Members come to visit either that day or in the following days just to comfort the Pages at all?

STANTON: Well, later that day, there was the famous moment where the Members of Congress gathered on the Capitol steps to sing “God Bless America,” and after that, one or two Members stopped by just to see how we were doing and to check in. I remember Heather Wilson from New Mexico stopped by, and I can't remember who else. Then the next day was—every Member of Congress who was in town was at session that day, and so many of us got to actually talk to our Member that day. I remember my sponsor, Congressman

[David Edward] Bonior, who was the Democratic Whip, came up, and I remember him putting his hand on my shoulder and asking if I had talked with my family and all, and really trying to comfort me.

JOHNSON: Did Jeff Trandahl, the Clerk of the House, come by on the 11th to talk to you?

STANTON: Jeff Trandahl was there, former Clerk Donald Anderson was there.¹ Donald Anderson was a very grandfatherly figure. He was very comforting in that way. He's a big guy, and he's been around for about half a century, {laughter} and I remember him that day just kind of putting it in historical perspective for us and saying, "I haven't seen the streets of Washington with this much mayhem since the [John F.] Kennedy assassination," because he had actually been here for the Kennedy assassination. I can't remember whether that was when he was a Page or just a couple of years afterwards. And so you had him there; the present Clerk at the time, Jeff Trandahl, was there; as were our work supervisors, Wren Ivester and Ms. [Peggy] Sampson, and most, if not all, of the House Page school staff.

JOHNSON: The Pages had the opportunity to attend the prayer service that was in the Capitol Rotunda in honor of the victims of 9/11, and this was on September 12th. Do you have any memories of this event?

STANTON: I would assume that—I remember going to a prayer service in the Rotunda. I assume that it was probably the same one. I remember it because it was the first time I saw a lot of sort of the political figures I had idolized, and so there was this odd mix of obviously being there just my second week away from home and, like, being in the same room as someone like [Edward Moore] Ted Kennedy and being there for this. I remember sitting there and listening to, I think it was the Marine Band playing, and just watching all these

luminaries in there. And I was just sitting in a row of 16-year-olds, and it was just so bizarre. And I remember, during the service, just always looking up at the Rotunda and imagining in my head, over and over again, like, the tip of a plane crashing through. And that's my main memory of the prayer service. And I remember towards the end of it, there was a singer who sang "Amazing Grace," and that song in particular caused a lot of us to get emotional.

JOHNSON: What about the vigil that took place down by the Capitol Reflecting Pool? This was mostly staff, congressional staff, that attended.

STANTON: Yes, I was there. That one was more a vigil that people had the option to go to after work if they wanted to. And so I think there was a group of about five of us that headed down there after work, and it was just such a warm feeling, actually being there. Everybody was just huddled in one giant mass holding candles. It was candlelit; you're right there along the reflecting pool. And the five or so Pages, we were all holding one another's hands as we snaked through the crowd. And I remember just sitting there right along the reflecting pool and listening as the crowd sort of quietly, reverentially, sang the national anthem or sang "God Bless America."

I remember as we began to proceed through the crowd, there was—at one point, there was a group of a few people that started clapping for us, which was wholly undeserved, and I don't know what spawned that. And then {laughter} after that, I remember a reporter being there and asking if he could get a comment. At that point, we kind of snapped back to our normal Page duties, which it's drilled into you over and over again that you say, "I refer all questions to the Office of the Clerk." And even now, 10 years after the event, I remember the phrase. We continued to go through the crowd. And over on the north end of the Capitol Reflecting Pool there was a fire truck with DC

fire officers and a long processional of people waiting to shake their hands, and we all waited and went through that.

JOHNSON: In the days following the attacks, did you have any thoughts of leaving the Page program and also of leaving Washington, DC?

STANTON: I personally didn't. There were a lot of Pages who did, and there are a couple of Pages who ended up making that decision to leave. But for me, it was a question of—I didn't really want to be anywhere else. I wanted to be there and be part of history. It's just such a unique experience, and I wasn't willing to give it up. The Page program, in particular, was something I'd aimed at doing for two or three years, and I wasn't going to leave {laughter} after two weeks.

JOHNSON: As you mentioned, the House is back in session on the next day, on September 12th. Many Members took the floor to speak about the attacks, and there also was a unanimous resolution that was passed, condemning the attacks. What are your recollections of this day, and specifically, what about the mood, and how would you describe the atmosphere on the floor?

STANTON: It was a very communal atmosphere. That day, I had been assigned flag duty, which meant that I had to deliver flags that had flown over the Capitol to Members' offices in the office buildings. So I had gone around and done that as quickly as I could in the morning because I wanted to get back there before the House got into session. And I came back—I arrived during the first speech, midway through Dick [Richard Keith] Armey's speech. And so I was there for Congressman [Richard Andrew] Gephardt's speech, which—the speeches that day, it's actually one of the few times I remember being there where a Member of either party would say something and get a robust applause from both sides. It was just a very sort of communal atmosphere. I

would liken it to sort of being at a funeral in that everyone's mourning, but there's also a sense of calm and purpose, and there's unity in that.

JOHNSON:

You mentioned the flag duty that you had, which made me think of another question I wanted to ask you. In the aftermath of 9/11, there were a lot of commemorative pins and flags across the country and then also around the Capitol community. What types of commemorative displays do you recall, and was there something that the Pages were also involved in as far as commemoration?

STANTON:

Sure. Well, we all wore ribbons, which we got from the cloakroom. I still have mine at home. And so that's certainly something that I remember. I remember actually getting it before a few Members of Congress and inquisitively asking me where I got that and really how a 16-year-old got it {laughter} before they did. And in terms of other displays, I remember one thing that we did at the Page School was that we—and by “we” I mean the principal of the Page School—decided to have a “waving flag,” was the term that she used, where it would be a flag composed of the outlines of people's hands in red, white, and blue construction paper. And so the Pages were tasked {laughter} with going around and getting the outlines of hands of Members of Congress or staffers, which the staffers were more agreeable to than {laughter} many of the Members. And I remember going around, and I remember a Page getting James [A.] Traficant [Jr.]'s hand, and Traficant saying that, “The FBI would pay good money for these fingerprints,” {laughter} which is very James Traficant-ish. But that's my main memory of the waving flag. I was only here like a week prior, and so I can't really speak to the difference that much in terms of patriotic or festive displays.

JOHNSON: Did you notice a marked increase in the number of requests for flying flags over the Capitol because of what had happened?

STANTON: I didn't, but again, I was only there a week prior, so I didn't know. There was a heavy load of flags that you had to deliver every time you were on flag duty. You still got off work significantly earlier than most other Pages when you were assigned to deliver flags, so it was kind of a prized duty when it came around to you because you could essentially have a half day, and that would be the one opportunity that you'd have where you could go out on the town without operating under the buddy system. But no, I don't really have anything to compare it to in terms of the amount of requests for flags.

JOHNSON: As a Page, you were able to attend the September 20th Joint Session, and this was when President [George W.] Bush spoke to Congress. What personal memories do you have of this event, and, again, how would you describe the atmosphere in the chamber?

STANTON: We had been to a Joint Session in the first week—Vicente Fox—but in that first Joint Session, there were a lot of Members who didn't come. There were a lot of empty seats. And what they do when there are empty seats at a Joint Session is that it's actually filled up by Pages so that when you do the wide shot on TV, you're not insulting a foreign dignitary, that it looks like it's a full house. So I got to sit in a seat when Vicente Fox came. And I remember actually a staff member, who wasn't aware what Pages were, kind of grumbling as he stood there along the row, "How the hell did this high school tour group get on the House Floor?"

But the Joint Session after the 11th was obviously fully attended. And I remember earlier that day I was sitting on the House Floor just absentmindedly lost in thought, and I had a pen that had a laser pointer on

it, and that {laughter} frightened the Secret Service. They were worried that, {laughter} somehow, I'd smuggled something in.

But then that day, that night, rather, it was just so fascinating. I had watched the State of the Union addresses at home, and it was exactly that kind of atmosphere, with Members there really early. And again, the sort of thing with the processional of people who I hadn't seen before but who I had recognized from many years of watching the news—they proceeding in. The way that it works is whatever party's in the majority, their Pages are the ones that are on the aisle that get to shake the President's hand, at least that's the side, and so a lot of Democratic Pages actually went over to the Republican side just because they wanted to shake people's hands. And then a few of us stayed on the Democratic side and were there behind the TV camera, which then went out into the aisle. But I remember standing there and just being in awe of all these people again, and all sorts of Senators who were just household names and standing there and seeing Tony Blair [former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom] in the gallery.

I remember the moment that President Bush came in because it was the first time I had ever seen the President in person. And it was unlike anything I've ever experienced, really. Just the pride that everyone had at that moment was something to behold. The speech itself I don't remember all that much of, but I remember just this overwhelming feeling of pride during it, and I remember bits and pieces. I remember the moment where he held up a firefighter's badge—or a policeman's badge, excuse me. I remember the moment that he pointed out—I think Lisa Beamer was in the gallery.² And those are the moments that I mainly recall from that speech.

JOHNSON: What changes did you notice in security after 9/11?

STANTON: Well, I noticed one thing was that you couldn't drive around the Capitol nearly as much—the streets in between the House office buildings. I have a vague recollection that they were open to through traffic, at least to some extent, prior to the 11th, but I know for sure they were concrete barriered off afterwards. We obviously had to go through a lot of security constantly. Our dorm was technically a House office building, and so we had to go through a metal detector and put our backpacks on an X-ray machine every time we were leaving the dorm or coming into the dorm. Our school was in the Library of Congress, and so, again, we had to go through metal detectors and X-ray machines. Worked in the Congress, and every time you enter the Capitol, have to go through X-ray machines and metal detectors. So I don't have too much to compare it with just because it's such its own little world, but you definitely got the feeling that things were on lockdown in terms of security.

JOHNSON: Pages are known for their unfettered access throughout the Capitol. Did you notice after 9/11—and I know you didn't have a lot of time to compare it to—but were there now places that were off-limits to Pages?

STANTON: Not really, no. We still had sort of the unfettered access that you spoke to. We could still go around and sort of get lost in the Statuary Hall. So, no, we still had full access and all those privileges.

JOHNSON: When we spoke earlier, you had mentioned that there was a very personal connection that you and a lot of the other Pages had to the passengers and the crew that was on Flight 93. Could you talk a little bit about that and explain what you meant?

STANTON: Right. Well, Flight 93, to the best of my understanding, and, I think, the 9/11 Commission Report, they write of it either being headed for the White

House or the Capitol. And I would have to imagine that they were headed to the Capitol, just because the White House would be harder to pick out if you were flying a jet, whereas the Capitol's at the end of the National Mall, it's on a hill; it's impossible to miss as a target. And so those of us who were in the Page program, providing that the flight was actually headed to the Capitol, those of us in the Page program, in a very real sense, owe our lives to the passengers on Flight 93. They unquestionably saved my life. I would have been in the Capitol, I'm sure, by the time that the airplane had reached.

There's just an overwhelming sense of duty to their memory. I know those of us who were Pages at the time, every time September 11th rolls around, you see people mentioning Flight 93 in their Facebook statuses, or, in more profound ways, many have gone to visit Shanksville [Pennsylvania]. I know a number of us are planning on being there for the 10th anniversary this September and meeting with the widows and the husbands who lost wives and the children who lost parents because our existence is allowed solely because of the actions that they took.

JOHNSON:

Today I also wanted to ask you a few questions about the anthrax scare that took place about a month after 9/11. In October the House adjourned for five days so there could be an environmental sweep of all of the House office buildings. What do you recall about this period, and how did it affect your schedule as Pages?

STANTON:

Well, the anthrax scare, as I remember it, really began when the Speaker's Office got an envelope with white powder in it. And so, at that point, we were kind of taken into the dayroom again in the dorm, and the Clerk's staff came in and gave us a lecture about anthrax. And they gave us the option of going on anthrax medication if we wanted to. I didn't want to. There was

really no need for me to. It was incredibly unlikely that I would come into contact with it. But there were some Pages who did, and there were some Pages who relished the opportunity to, kind of called home after that meeting and said, “Mom, guess what, I’m on anthrax medicine,” trying to—I don’t even know what he was trying to get out of that.

But no, our school was shut down in the Library of Congress for, I believe, a week, so we had our classes in the dorm, which was odd. And, actually, living in the dorm, we stopped getting mail for a period of time. Then, beyond that, all of our mail began to be checked for anthrax, and so many of us never ended up getting letters from home or magazine subscriptions. And then they actually did need to test our dorm for anthrax since we were part of the House office building system, and so it was a weekend that a lot of us got to go home. There were some Pages who didn’t, and so they were, I think, bused out to Ocean City, Maryland. I got to go home. But it’s kind of a—again, in retrospect, it seems kind of—not whimsical, but it seems kind of weird and just kind of, just odd. And many of us refer to that weekend as “the anthrax weekend” or “anthrax weekend,” like, we have the shorthand. {laughter} It was odd. Just, in retrospect, you think of it just like you would anything else that happened to you in high school.

JOHNSON: Since you mentioned being in high school, as a high school student, how did you handle the fact that you had to evacuate the Capitol building, you were in fear for your life, and now, about a month later, there was the anthrax scare? How did that affect you personally?

STANTON: You know, personally, the 11th was the bigger shock, and it’s difficult for me to say specifically how I changed as a result of it versus how I would change as a result of the Page program in general. But I think that if you asked any

Page, really, the Page year is a watershed moment in their life, and it's a moment—it's a time where they really change. And, I was just talking with some Pages about this, and they said they couldn't even put a finger on how it was that they changed, they just know that it was a transformational time.

Living as a high school student and experiencing all that, it was, again, it was just—I really can't think of a better learning experience in any way. I was there for momentous occasions in American history, and here I am in the morning, studying government in the attic of the Library of Congress before heading off to work in the Congress. When you're in your math class, you're there, and you have a view of the entire National Mall. And in the weeks after September 11th, you could see the smoldering ruins of the Pentagon—you could see the smoke continuing to rise. And there was just, there was really, there was nothing to compare it to. And in terms of how I handled it, I think I handled it like any high schooler would have. You know, you still had homework, you still had tests and quizzes, you still had all the sort of teenage-y angst, we still had all the sort of cliques that you have in high school, but we had all these added layers on top of it.

JOHNSON: In your classes, did you discuss at all what had happened on the 11th or how this might have affected the country, how it might affect Congress, anything like that?

STANTON: We discussed it in our government class with Mr. Weitzel, and we really discussed stuff in the context of sort of a broader historical perspective. I remember him angrily citing a poll CNN had done which showed that most Americans in the wake of 9/11 thought that 9/11 would be more historically important than Pearl Harbor, and he was just commenting how ridiculous this was. Even at the time he was saying that. But I don't recall it being

specifically addressed in other classes. I think it was just—it was obviously always the elephant in the room, but, no, I remember really only talking about it in Mr. Weitzel's class and talking about that and the Constitution and the Federalist Papers and viewing the attacks within that broader context.

JOHNSON:

As a Page, again, you spent a lot of time in the cloakroom, in the Democratic Cloakroom in your case. Did you get a sense of Members trying to get a handle of what was going on or maybe even in some ways comforting one another or trying to assist each other?

STANTON:

A few things I remember in terms of interacting with Members. I remember one day we all showed up on the floor, and we couldn't actually get on the House Floor because the Members were having a confidential debriefing by either Colin Powell or John Ashcroft, I can't remember who.³ But, those of us who were Pages then had to stand out in the hallway and wait as the Members of the Cabinet left. But that was also the kind of thing, whereas the meeting was about to adjourn, the closed session, we were in the cloakroom, and you could kind of hear it going on in the background. But {laughter} we were just consumed by other, more petty stuff.

But in terms of the Members interacting with one another over the 11th, I just remember a really collegial atmosphere at the time. You know, it really was a moment where partisan issues faded into the background, and that was true of the Page program and also the Congress, but that lasted relatively briefly because you had more controversial legislation that came up for votes later that year. Just a month or two later was No Child Left Behind, and there was fast track trade legislation, and so, eventually, things got back into sort of the normal hum of everyday partisanship.

But at the time, my main memories of Members of Congress are either really sort of the odd ones like James Traficant {laughter} or even sort of funny ones. There were some Members who just don't give you the time of day, and they just, "You're a 16-year-old; I don't even need to say hi." And there are some that are really nice and who made a point of saying hi every time they came over. There were some like Jerrold [Louis] Nadler, who sat down on the Page bench a couple times and was just reading a book that we had there. There are some who bought pizza on late nights and would have it delivered to the cloakroom. There were others who angrily accused Pages of doing things that they didn't do. You have a witness of—you're able to witness all sorts of stuff that just seemed so funny in retrospect.

I remember one moment—and this isn't at all related to the 11th—but where James Traficant was speaking on the floor of the House, and I was standing behind the Page desk in the back corner. And Congressman Gerald [Daniel] Kleczka from Wisconsin came up in front of me, and he started to heckle Traficant. And Traficant darted his head around, and, at that moment, Kleczka ducked down, so it looked I had been the one heckling. {laughter} And just seeing that sort of odd high school-y behavior coming from a Member of Congress was just—{laughter} it was, in one sense, it was actually really refreshing, and it was nice that he was joking around with us and actually talking to us. Kleczka then sat me down, and he sort of intoned like he was going to say something very serious, and he said, "Zack, I want you to remember that when you grow up; I do not want you to be like Congressman Traficant." {laughter} So, no, I remember those kind of things. But in terms of—after the 11th, I think everyone was just comforting one another.

JOHNSON: I had a few wrap-up questions to end today. The first one was what are your lasting memories of September 11th, and, specifically, is there one visual that comes to mind no matter how much time passes that you think will stick with you?

STANTON: My lasting memory of September 11th is obviously in terms of Flight 93 and the very real sense that they saved my lives, and that I just have an unpayable debt that I owe to those families. In terms of memories, lasting images that I have, at this point, I've talked through my memories so many times that you wonder if you even remember it accurately—and I'm pretty sure that I do—but, at this point, I think that they're almost memories of memories. And so I remember bits and pieces here. I remember huddling around the small little 17-inch TV in the cloakroom and watching everything. I remember standing on the House Floor, and it was just vacant at the time except for Pages, and just kind of standing there and quietly crying and just feeling just how surreal and movie-like this all was. And here I am, a 16-year-old, looking at the American flag behind the Speaker's Chair, and I'm here of all places. I'll remember being at the candlelight vigil on the National Mall. I'll remember sitting in the Rotunda and imagining it being crashed into by a plane. I'll remember the Joint Session and the President holding the policeman's badge. Those are things that I just can't imagine ever forgetting.

JOHNSON: It's almost the 10-year anniversary of September 11th, and you've obviously had a lot of time to reflect. What perspective do you now have in these 10 years that have passed?

STANTON: Well, again, it's the kind of thing where you know in retrospect, when you look back how things turned out, but, at the time, it was just such a sense of insecurity, but also born of this horrific moment was a brief moment over the

last decade where all partisan labels just fell aside, and people really just talked to one another and saw one another as Americans first and foremost. And, you know, there are obviously all sorts of tragedies associated with the 11th, and one of the lingering ones beyond, obviously, all the enormous human tragedy, is the tragedy that the nation wasn't able to sustain that sense of common purpose and unity.

JOHNSON: How did you feel when you heard the very recent news of the death of Osama bin Laden?

STANTON: I was elated, frankly, and I know there was a wide mix of opinion on it and people aghast at people being elated and other people not caring that people were aghast. But no, I was elated. I was supposed to come back to Washington, DC, that day on a flight—I was home in Michigan—and my flight got canceled. So I was sitting in New Baltimore, Michigan. I was on Twitter when it was happening, and I was reading on Twitter that people were saying bin Laden was dead. I started text messaging other Pages, frankly. I text-messaged, like, five other Pages. I called one, and he hadn't heard and was turning on the TV right then. We were just all in touch with one another. I was just elated, and it felt like it was finally bringing some finality to the past decade.

JOHNSON: And lastly, how do you think the events of September 11th changed your life?

STANTON: I think, in one sense, it gave me a sense of my own mortality, which you really don't have as a 16-year-old. You feel invincible. And being there, I did actually have a moment where I thought I was going to die when I was running away from the Capitol. And, in that sense, it completely changed my life. In a broader sense, it changed me in that, aside from giving me a greater

appreciation, I think, for the opportunities that I do have and that we all have, I think being there and experiencing that sort of unity that everyone was feeling really make me ache for it all the more and think of it as an even greater tragedy that we're unable to get back to that type of attitude.

JOHNSON: Was there anything else that you wanted to add today that we hadn't covered?

STANTON: Not that I can think of off the top of my head. You know, I'm sure I could go on and on, {laughter} but we all have time constraints.

JOHNSON: Okay. Thank you very much for coming in today.

STANTON: It was my pleasure.

NOTES

¹The Office of the House Historian conducted a series of oral history interviews with Donald K. Anderson, <https://history.house.gov/Oral-History/People/Donald-Anderson/>.

² President Bush recognized Lisa Beamer, widow of Jeff Beamer, during the Joint Session on September 20, 2001. Jeff Beamer was one of the passengers on Flight 93 who attempted to regain control of the flight from the terrorists causing the plane to crash in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, rather than in one of the intended targets (White House or U.S. Capitol).

³ Colin Powell was serving as U.S. Secretary of State and John Ashcroft as U.S. Attorney General when the attacks occurred on September 11, 2001.