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THE WHITE HOUSE

Office of the Vice President

Internal Transcript

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INTERVIEW OF ERIC EDELMAN  
BY EVAN THOMAS OF NEWSWEEK MAGAZINE

MR. EDELMAN's Office

**MR. EDELMAN:** Well, let me just try and relive the experience, as I can. I got into this -- you know, I work for the Vice President, I'm a career Foreign Service Officer. I worked for him at the Pentagon, 1990-'93, (inaudible) the Under Secretary, (inaudible) was the Principal Deputy Under Secretary. And I was the (inaudible) or Russia, Soviet Affairs (inaudible).

Most recently, I've been Ambassador to Finland, came back to be Scooter's Deputy. As you know, wears two hats, he's both Chief of Staff for the Vice President and the National Security Advisor, (inaudible) Deputy National Security Advisor.

So my day started on this -- I was actually in Scooter's office, which is the Chief of Staff Office across the way over there. (Inaudible) Assistant Secretary of the Navy Office, which is occupied by TR and FDR.

**Q** There's a storied office.

**MR. EDELMAN:** Yes. It's right across -- it's just right across the hall here, right where the uniformed Secret Service desk is.

Scooter wears three hats: the Assistant to the President, Chief of Staff to the Vice President and National Security Advisor (inaudible).

I was in with him -- I was getting ready to go to the senior directors' meeting that Condi Rice chairs every morning at 9:00 a.m. (inaudible). And I was in talking to him, I believe about Middle East peace process issues, (inaudible).

And as we were talking and I was getting ready to go -- he had something at 9:00 a.m. I believe also, but I can't recall -- his assistant, Jenny Mayfield, came in and said, a plane has just hit the World Trade Center. And we both

looked at her and Scooter said, well, do people think it's a terrorist act. She said, I don't know. She said, they're reporting that it's a small plane.

So we looked at each other and said, well, it could be an accident, and turned on the television, and kept talking. And while we were talking the second plane hit the tower. We looked at each other and said, that's no accident.

**Q** Were you actually watching TV when it hit the second tower?

**MR. EDELMAN:** I've seen so many video images now of the second plane hitting the tower that, to be honest, I cannot recall whether we were actually watching it at the time. I think the TV was on. You'll have to check this -- I can't recall exactly. I think we saw it.

**Q** Who said, that's no accident?

**MR. EDELMAN:** Scooter did. And then (inaudible). He said, I better go see the boss. And I said, I'll go down (inaudible) Condi's staff meeting.

**Q** Now, when this first thing, when Jenny said to you, a plane just hit the World Trade Center. And Scooter asked, do you think it's terrorism --

**MR. EDELMAN:** No, he didn't say, do you think it is. He said, is it being reported as a terrorist act? The first thing (inaudible) said is, I think it's a small plane.

**Q** The reason why I'm asking is, of course, I'm interested in this whole process, oh, geeze -- when does the light bulb do on? Well, there had been all these reports and all these threats and all --

**MR. EDELMAN:** Yes. I think had the first report been a 757 has just hit the World Trade Center, that would have probably triggered a slightly different response. But what we were first told was, a small plane has hit the Trade Center. You know, you can imagine that happening.

But as soon as we saw the second one (inaudible), we immediately -- and this all, you know, this was at a very short period of time.

**Q** Yes. And I don't mean to peel this onion too fine here, but I'm wondering whether in your head you're thinking --

**MR. EDELMAN:** The initial report both had us on the alert that this might be something, but we were going to

wait and see. The second one, there was no doubt. So he went down to see the Vice President. I went down to the Situation Room for the senior directors' meeting that Condi chairs.

Q Senior directors' meeting, what is that?

MR. EDELMAN: She chairs a meeting, along with Steve Hadley, of the senior directors of the National Security Council. Those are the people responsible for the -- both the kind of geographical, regional areas, as well as the various functional areas. Her senior staff.

And I usually go as the Vice President's (inaudible) Deputy National Security Advisor to the Vice President, (inaudible).

We were -- Condi came in and chaired the meeting for a few minutes and then went off to take a call from the President.

Q Was she summoned from the --

MR. EDELMAN: She was, I believe, summoned from the room. Meanwhile, Dick Clark was chairing a meeting, a secure video conference room in another room. And Steve Hadley and I -- when she left, the meeting broke and people started to head over. And I headed over with Steve Hadley to that room.

I stopped along the way to watch the President speak -- he came out and spoke, I was watching him on television. And then went on to join the meeting with Steve. And it was in that meeting, during the course of that meeting decisions were being made by Dick Clark and all the counter-terrorism folks; ground civil aviation at that point, bring all the planes down.

Q This was made by whom?

MR. EDELMAN: Well, I came in after -- it was a group, you know, decision (inaudible) inter-agency process.

Q This is in a different room?

MR. EDELMAN: Different room than the Situation Room. We have another room (inaudible) secure video conferences.

Q And because he's the counter-terror -- national security counter-terror guy he --

MR. EDELMAN: Right. He was already chairing the meeting, while we were at the other meeting.

Q This is a regular meeting, or a meeting (inaudible) because of this?

MR. EDELMAN: As a result of the incident.

Q And who was on the video conference?

MR. EDELMAN: You know, I was barely in the room long enough. It's all the various agencies, Mineta, FAA and Justice, Defense and a group of other agencies. You'd have to check with him for who actually all was in there, because I was only in there very briefly. \*

A couple minutes later, Steve Hadley pulled me aside and said, it might be a good idea -- Dick Clark and I have been talking -- you might want to consider relocating the Vice President. He said, he's already down in the PEOC; you need to go down there and pass that on to him and ask him (inaudible).

So I made my way down to the PEOC. It took me a few minutes to get there, security was extremely tight. The Secret Service is posted at various way stations.

And got in there, the Vice President was there, Scooter was there, Condi was down there. A lot of other staff were there. A small number, but (inaudible) numbers varied during the course of the day. But I went to the Vice President, and spoke with him, explained that counter-terrorism types were concerned about his safety. We knew we were dealing with -- and Secretary Mineta was down there, by the way -- concerned about his safety and raising the issue of relocation to an alternate site.

He didn't even hesitate for one second -- and Condi was there -- he said, no; he said, I don't want to leave, we've got a lot of connectivity here with the President. And I'm not sure, he may have already spoken to the President by that point, I'm not sure.

Q You said a lot of connectivity?

MR. EDELMAN: Connectivity.

Q I see.

MR. EDELMAN: Connectivity, in terms of telecommunications. And he said, if I move, get out of here and move, I'm going to lose some of that (inaudible) secure communications, (inaudible). So he said, I'm going to stay here. And we (inaudible).

So I was then asked to convey that message back to (Inaudible) and Dick Clark. And I was going to physically go back up and do that. Scooter said, why don't you get them on the phone, I think we may need you down here. So I stayed (inaudible).

**Q** Now, just to go back for one second what happened (inaudible) asked you to go down and talk to the Vice President about this. Do you know -- and I'm going to interview Hadley next, so I'm going to ask him this, myself -- but do you know what he and Clark were talking about that made him want to do that? Is this the other airplane? I mean, I guess what I'm fishing for is the awareness of other planes in the air.

**MR. EDELMAN:** Well, we knew that there were other hijacked planes at that point.

**Q** So what time -- where are we in the time line?

**MR. EDELMAN:** Because the -- I don't believe that the -- well, I'm not sure -- the President -- let me say, the Vice President had been taken down there, I understand, when they, you know, were under the impression that one of the hijacked planes might be headed towards restricted airspace over Washington. And that's the plane that ultimately hit the Pentagon.

I was already down in the PEOC with the Vice President when we got word that there had been an explosion at the Pentagon.

**Q** So you were actually in the PEOC when that happened?

**MR. EDELMAN:** When that happened.

**Q** Was that before your conversation with him? You were in the PEOC before or after you had this conversation with him?

**MR. EDELMAN:** I cannot recall exactly the sequence about when we first heard that there had been an explosion at the Pentagon. There was some initial confusion about whether what hit the Pentagon was a helicopter or an aircraft. We pretty quickly determined that it was, in fact, an aircraft.

But I can't recall the exact -- I believe that my conversation with him about relocating was before we had the actual report. It was certainly before we knew that it was another airplane. But it might not have been before the first report of an explosion at the Pentagon. Because there

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was then a whole series of reports that we had that (inaudible) the Pentagon. The report of a car bomb, this was on television, this was on CNN, we had CNN on the screen down there -- report of a car bomb at the State Department, report of a car bomb at the Capitol, report of a car bomb at the Lincoln Memorial. These all turned out to be false.

And it may have been --

Q I remember the Mall, report of the State Department and the Mall. I don't remember a report of a car bomb at the Lincoln Memorial.

MR. EDELMAN: We were hearing a whole bunch of these things. It wouldn't surprise me in the least if some of this was because people had heard from various vantage points the explosion at the Pentagon, and looked, you know, in the direction and saw and they --

Q I mean, an interesting thing that you're getting information from -- I'm just trying to get all the incoming signals here. You're getting information from CNN that is essentially inaccurate --

MR. EDELMAN: But we were also getting information from other sources, as well.

Q That was accurate? Or what was it?

MR. EDELMAN: We were getting information from, directly from the Pentagon, we were in touch with the Pentagon, at various points. And at one point -- and again, I can't tell you exactly when this took place -- but we established a video conference with Secretary Rumsfeld at one point. We had the Secret Service bringing this information that was coming into their center.

And Secretary Mineta was in touch with the FAA operations center, and they're giving us very real-time data about the number of aircraft, trying to narrow down the number of aircraft that had been hijacked, while all the aircraft that (inaudible) brought down. As the aircraft came down and were on deck, we were able to, by a process of elimination, determine how many had been hijacked. And we were still chasing down some reports that turned out to be false that other aircraft had been hijacked.

And we were still -- Flight 93, since that's one of the things that we obviously knew (inaudible) focused on, it turned out it was still out there. And we knew it was out there and we knew it was heading our way. (Inaudible) was concerned about what -- after we had determined, ascertained

that the other flight had hit the Pentagon, we were not sure what was coming our way, we weren't -- had a number of false reports about where it was headed, or where it was down. We knew it was heading our way.

Q I mean, just to (inaudible), the Pentagon is hit at about 9:39 a.m. Flight 93 made its turn out there at about a half an hour before it hit, so just about as the Pentagon is hit, the other plane makes its turn. So you have -- there's about a 20 to 25-minute gap in there. And you are hearing what?

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MR. EDELMAN: We are hearing that it has turned, and it's headed our way, coming in our direction. That it had been hijacked.

Q Who conveys that to you? Do you remember how you heard that?

MR. EDELMAN: I believe it was from Secretary Mineta.

Q Do you remember how he, --

MR. EDELMAN: I think he was getting it from the FAA command center, that the plane had been hijacked; we knew that it was headed our way.

Q But do you remember anything about --

MR. EDELMAN: I remember someone saying it was 15 minutes out, 10 minutes out -- I can't remember exactly. (Inaudible) airspace area.

Q Do you remember who was saying that?

MR. EDELMAN: I can't remember who is saying it. I mean, it's a (inaudible) of people and voices at that point.

Q I mean, I want to try to get the atmospherics of that, because it's always interesting to see -- I mean, there's the whole phenomenon of a lot of information coming --

MR. EDELMAN: There was a lot of information coming. And the Vice President and I and others who were there -- you know, there were various, you know, kind of conversations, fragments of conversations going on.

I served earlier in my career at the State Department Operations Center and been (inaudible) various crises, you know, on watch in the operations center. When we shot down the two Libyan jets in the first Reagan administration, I guess it was the summer of 1981. And I was there when

martial law was declared in Poland, in December of '91. And a couple of other events. And you learn from these things that, you know, early reports are frequently wrong or inaccurate or don't have all the information or you get partial information, fragmentary information. And people sometimes put the fragmentary information together and jump to the wrong conclusion.

The Vice President was seated at the table in the PEOC. There is a conference table. He was seated at the table opposite the screens where the television, where they had projected various, CNN, MSNBC. (Inaudible). And Secretary Mineta was on his other, on the other side.

**Q** So the screens he's watching are commercial TV stations? That's what is on the screens?

**MR. EDELMAN:** Yes. We also had -- I mean, we also have, you know, a capability down there for video and conferencing. So we were also doing video conference.

**Q** And so was that another thing? I'm just trying to visualize what --

**MR. EDELMAN:** Yes, I've got to be a little bit careful here in the description of the room itself, which is classified. But you have a capability of seeing television and also having video conferencing there.

**Q** Was he video conferencing?

**MR. EDELMAN:** Well, we had one, as I said, with Secretary Rumsfeld, and various other (inaudible). And there was one later in the day with the President.

**Q** In that moment, in that 15 minutes that we're talking about, was he video conferencing?

**MR. EDELMAN:** No, not at that point. There was a -- there was the video conference that Dick Clark was chairing was going on. And that was -- but we could see that, so that was on the screen, we could follow that. Not always with audio, but we were -- sometimes with audio, sometimes not, because we were doing lots of other things while that was going on.

**Q** And what is the -- I'm interested in the tones of voices. I'll tell you why: I've spent a lot of time listening to the tapes of the Cuban Missile Crisis -- you can buy them for \$100. And it's fascinating, because it's very rare -- now, this is not analogous, because it's not that kind of real-time (inaudible). But that last Saturday it's getting a little, there are a couple of real-time



moments when the blockade begins and there's a Russian sub there, and then when we shoot down (inaudible) on the last Saturday.

And it's interesting to me that I -- you can almost hear people working, keeping their voices neutral and flat. They're not going, "Oh, my God!" you know, the sky is falling.

**MR. EDELMAN:** It was -- that wasn't going on. The Vice President was, as I said, seated at the conference chair, he had a legal pad, he had his pen, he was taking notes, as certain developments were recorded. And he was trying to keep track of the aircraft (inaudible). He had written down the flight numbers, as he was receiving that information from Secretary Mineta.

But I mean, as I said, I've worked with him before, and I remember being with him the day the Gulf War began. I didn't have any responsibilities in the Gulf War. He called me and a group of colleagues in to talk about some testimony he was going to give later on the Defense budget, when they talked about the Soviet peace. I remember being struck then by how -- I mean, I described (inaudible) that night to my wife, (inaudible), and I described it to my wife as kind of cool (inaudible) serenity surrounded by all sorts of tension.

He was like that again on the 11th. He was very calm. There was tension in the air -- I mean, obviously, we were clearly under attack of some kind. We did not completely know the dimensions of it. As I said, we were getting all these false reports of other car bomb, car bomb, that turned out not true. But the Pentagon had been hit. We had -- Don Rumsfeld had been actually out at the site and been able to describe some of what he had seen.

**Q** Before -- this is in this 15-minute gap and the other plane still in the air? Or --

**MR. EDELMAN:** Well, that, I can't really recall now again where in the time line that conference was, (inaudible). I do know that when -- I remember (inaudible) we thought Flight 93 was coming at us, coming close, (inaudible) towards Washington. We then got some reports that it was down; there was some confusion about where it was down.

And then there was some confusion about exactly why it was down -- had it been crashed intentionally or what happened. But I remember the Vice President saying at that point, I think when they finally figured out that it was down in southern Pennsylvania, and we had eliminated every

other explanation for why it went down, I remember him saying -- at that point he said, I think an act of heroism just took place on that plane. He was ahead of a lot of the rest of us. I think he had figured that out.

Another area (inaudible) I think his expertise from having been the CEO of a large company that included a company that does a lot of construction stuff (inaudible). Some of us, when the Trade Center came down, and then the second one came down, some of us I think were a bit stunned by how, the way it came down. As you recall from seeing the tapes, it almost looked like (inaudible) charges on each floor to bring it to the ground. Some of us were speculating that maybe, you know, there was some kind of charge on the ground or in the building. You know, we were dealing with all sorts of speculation.

But he basically said, well, just the way it looks to me, it just pancaked and (inaudible), top (inaudible) came down; just pancaked the rest of the building. His sense of all this was pretty impressive, I have to say -- not just because I work for him.

**Q** Of course, the timing is that those buildings are collapsing as Flight 93 -- it's almost simultaneous (inaudible). The building collapses right after (inaudible).

**MR. EDELMAN:** It's almost (inaudible).

**Q** So you're getting -- talk about sensory inputs, you're seeing the World Trade Center go down.

**MR. EDELMAN:** It seemed a lot longer than it -- you know, when I've actually seen the time lines of all this, (inaudible). I mean, it seemed like it took a lot longer than, in fact, it did. I know it was happening pretty fast.

**Q** Now, on the whole issue of shooting down, which the Vice President, himself, wanted to talk to you about, (inaudible) press. Replay that discussion for me, the decisions about scrambling fighters and whether they're going to take out Flight 93. How does that evolve?

**MR. EDELMAN:** I was not in the room for all of that. I knew we had fighters up. My involvement in that really was sort of later, which is when we were trying to (inaudible) and our (inaudible) were trying to put the statement together, talking about what we knew at that point. My connection to that was working with the National Military Command Center, (inaudible) folks who were down with us, trying to get back to the (inaudible). (Inaudible) absolutely, positively sure that we knew exactly what had

happened with Flight 93. And, of course, to make sure that it hadn't been shot down. (Inaudible) to do that.

Q But what do you know about that decision, and how it played out in that? Because obviously it's an interesting (inaudible).

MR. EDELMAN: Well, I know he talked to the President about it on the phone, which goes to the issue you raised in the beginning. He was on the phone with the President constantly, and I was not in the room all the time that he was on the phone. I was in and out of the room because there was another area where -- there were a lot of people who needed to make a lot of phone calls. We didn't have enough phone instruments everywhere. So I was in and out of that room, dealing with some other phone calls. So I was not really there for all of that discussion.

Q But you were aware that it was going on?

MR. EDELMAN: I was aware that there was discussion about how -- what the rules of engagement would be and how would they engage (inaudible). Then heard subsequently that the President had given instructions (inaudible).

Q So you were aware the rules of engagement were being discussed before (inaudible)?

MR. EDELMAN: Yes.

Q In that period (inaudible)?

MR. EDELMAN: Yes.

Q Was there any debate over that? I mean, these are as much as I can address to the Vice President (inaudible), but I just -- it's such an obviously grotesque decision that people are going to want to know how it --

MR. EDELMAN: I wasn't privy to the discussions, so I can't comment. Obviously, it's a very difficult (inaudible), that kind of (inaudible) -- the most difficult, weighty decision a national leader could ever make. I do remember thinking afterwards that -- (inaudible).

Q I'll say, yes. But you know what I'm searching for here. This is something that people are going to be intensely interested in, precisely because it is the (inaudible) decision, it's out of (inaudible).

MR. EDELMAN: It is -- I'm not speaking now for the Vice President because, as I said, I wasn't privy to those

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discussions, and I can't read his mind because, you know, he wasn't talking about it very much.

But, you know, we knew that three planes had been flown into buildings, and that any other planes that were up there were likely headed for other buildings. In that sense -- and I'm speculating (inaudible) -- the decision may have been a bit easier to make than people might otherwise think because the calculation, I'm sure, was that these people were going to die anyway. And that certainly is a calculation, it appears, that folks on Flight 93 made.

**Q** Was there any -- did anybody express any relief that the decision didn't have to be executed?

**MR. EDELMAN:** I don't recall that anyone -- I don't recall anyone making an observation or comment (inaudible). We were still wrestling with -- we were still trying to ascertain -- I think Secretary Mineta was in contact constantly with the FAA, until we get a sense of how many -- it took a while to land everybody, get all the planes down, and give us some sense of what we were dealing with. I mean, we didn't know how many -- we didn't know how many planes had been hijacked.

And people should remember that Ramzi Youssef had a plan where he was going to hijack, it think it was 11 planes. So some of us who had followed that --

**Q** Were you thinking of that consciously at the time?

**MR. EDELMAN:** Oh, yes. I mean, we didn't know how many planes were (inaudible). I mean, I was. I don't know who else -- I can't speak for anybody else.

**Q** But you knew enough of the history of (inaudible)?

**MR. EDELMAN:** I knew the history.

**Q** Parenthetically, I think it's still somewhat of an open issue about whether there was a fifth plane, isn't it? I mean, they still have these guys (inaudible).

**MR. EDELMAN:** The guy -- the San Antonio guys?

**Q** Yes.

**MR. EDELMAN:** I don't know. That I couldn't say. I wouldn't want to speculate on it; I couldn't speculate on it, because I don't know any (inaudible). That's an ongoing law enforcement investigation.

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**Q** In terms of the tension, how does it show itself? Nobody was yelling, but how is it -- I'm going to have to convey how tension (inaudible).

**MR. EDELMAN:** Yes, I know. And I'm trying to think about how to describe that.

**Q** How does it reveal itself?

**MR. EDELMAN:** Part of it is out-of-body experience, (inaudible) have these things going on and the fleeting thoughts that you have. A couple of us who were down there -- we really were not in any position -- for security reasons, we couldn't even call our families. I remember periodically having the thought that, you know, my wife is going to be nervous because she's going to see on TV or hear on TV that the White House has been evacuated -- she's going to be saying, where is Eric, what's happening? But I sort of repressed those thoughts because you're just so busy trying to do other things.

You know, it's very -- I'm sorry, this is going to sound like a terrible cliché -- it's very hard to describe it. Partially because it's -- you know, you, yourself, are feeling a certain amount of tension and pressure. Part of it was I think that because he is so incredibly calm, I think he exerts incredibly calming influence on people, because you would sort of be embarrassed to, in front of him, betray any sense of, oh my God.

So in that sense, his presence I think -- I'm not saying that he eased the tension, (inaudible) ease the tension. But he certainly, just by his (inaudible), I think assured that there was a certain level in the calm in the room, because people (inaudible). I don't think I'm the only one; I think anybody would have felt a little bit silly, (inaudible) kind of flapping in a situation where these very weighty decisions are being made by him, and people knew it.

**Q** So there were no raised voices?

**MR. EDELMAN:** I honestly don't recall anybody raising their voice.

**Q** Could you hear fear in anybody's voice?

**MR. EDELMAN:** No. I mean, I think people -- I mean, that part of it was odd, in a sense that, looking back on it, one might have thought that you would hear that. But everybody was pretty calm. Everybody was pretty, you know, trying to do the job.

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Periodically, I mean, you know, Condi at one point turned to me -- we were actually in the other room, she was about to make a phone call. We were watching the TV screen above us. They were replaying the film of the second plane going in. And she turned to me and said, you know, it really is like your very worst nightmare. I said, yes, it really is.

But that was -- but it wasn't, it wasn't fear. It was merely an observation.

Q It was surreal.

MR. EDELMAN: And it was -- there was a surreal quality to it, I have to say, watching it over and over again on the TV, watching the Trade Centers come down. I remember -- I would say then -- I've seen photographs subsequently of myself and the Vice President and others who were in the room as the Trade Center came down. And this is what I mean about the out-of-body experience. You know, if you picture the look on our faces, was sort of stricken. But I don't recall (inaudible) at all. And I don't recall anything other than -- I can remember being horrified as it happened and watching it. But I also remember, sort of, it was kind of in the midst of while we were doing all this other stuff. So there is this --

Q You've seen a photo from where? Where is this?

MR. EDELMAN: The official photographer was down there, the Vice President's official photographer, David Vohrer was there.

Q What's his name?

MR. EDELMAN: David Vohrer.

Q (Inaudible).

MR. EDELMAN: Yes, I'm not sure what the deal is on that. I'm not sure what the deal is on that. I'm not sure whether they can release any of those, because of the (inaudible), where it's at.

Q On the where it's at front, I mean, I guess physically, even if the plane had hit you, you would have survived in that facility.

MR. EDELMAN: I guess. I guess.

Q (Inaudible).

MR. EDELMAN: That I can't comment on; I don't know.

Q Then there was, upstairs, talk of people looking up in the sky and seeing planes circling, (inaudible). Because there were planes (inaudible) there, people literally running from the White House and the Secret Service shooing them out.

MR. EDELMAN: I've heard all those anecdotal reports, but I was downstairs, so I don't know.

Q Pushing forward now, I guess the next issue people are curious about is where -- the decision to keep the President -- he goes to Louisiana and then he goes to Offutt. And at the time, all of us jumped all over him for not coming back to Washington. Can you walk us through any of that?

MR. EDELMAN: Again, I was in and out of the room, so I want to be careful to make sure I tell you what I really know as opposed to what I surmised or what I might have learned afterwards.

The Vice President was on the phone very, very frequently with the President. They made the initial determination, I believe, that the President should not return immediately, he should go to Barksdale. As I said earlier, we were still not sure what the dimensions of this thing (inaudible). We had all these other reports, it turned out to be false. But my own view, I never, ever had any second thoughts about anything that happened that day.

I know there has been this to-and-fro about, you know, was there a real threat to Air Force One. I can't tell you whether there was or not, because I don't know that. I do know that we had a report -- I was there when it was brought to the Vice President -- that there have been a call (inaudible) the Secret Service that said Air Force was next, using the code word for Air Force One. I don't know if that was a (inaudible). I can't speak to that.

But I can speak to the fact that I was in the room when it came in.

Q That's actually pretty interesting, when you say you had witnessed this scene, somebody coming in, saying to the Vice President --

MR. EDELMAN: I heard it. I don't know -- there was a babble, there was a cacophony of voices. So I don't know whether I was hearing someone say it or someone repeating what they heard someone say. But the point is whether it turned out to be true -- we had a lot of reports that day that did not turn out to be true. But I think it would have

probably been irresponsible for us to, given what was going on that day, to assume right off the bat that they weren't true, until we had gotten a better feel for (inaudible).

Q Because this has been a source of some --

MR. EDELMAN: (Inaudible).

Q You heard someone --

MR. EDELMAN: Yes. Someone came into the room and said, we just got a message that Air Force One is next. Someone had called -- (inaudible) what I heard. Now, I don't -- I've subsequently heard all sorts of stories about this; I've never run it back myself, so I don't know.

Q Where did the code word (inaudible)?

MR. EDELMAN: I was told that -- I think I either asked somebody, well, how do we know it's Air Force One? And they said, well, they used a code word that's used for Air Force One.

So this was the discussion going on in the room at the time. And so, I am convinced that (inaudible) the Vice President spoke to the President. Again, I wasn't in all these conversations. But I absolutely am convinced that he believed at that point that we had a still credible threat out there, the safety of Air Force One. You know, I've heard a lot of other people saying, well, how would they do that, it's not really possible. That may all be true. I don't know, I can't speak to it. But I can only speak to kind of what the considerations were in that room (inaudible).

Q Who's delivering that message? We've just got a message that Air Force One is (inaudible)?

MR. EDELMAN: I believe it came from Secret Service.

Q And do you believe there was a phone call?

MR. EDELMAN: I don't know. That I just don't know. As I said, I've not run the tape back, I've been busy doing other stuff since then. But for me it was enough that we thought -- we thought that was happening, and we thought that was out there. And when the President and the Vice President spoke on the phone -- and the President, I think, was very anxious to come back, for obvious reasons.

Q When was that --



**MR. EDELMAN:** The Vice President, I think, was saying until we are of a little bit greater certainty that this attack is over, it's probably best for you to say at a secure location. And then it came up -- I'm not sure exactly where the idea to go to Offutt was, but we knew there was secure video there, and that was one of the considerations.

**Q** Where does this discussion happen?

**MR. EDELMAN:** (Inaudible).

**Q** I mean, it was just a -- he building is down at 10:30 a.m. --

**MR. EDELMAN:** You know, I didn't take notes contemporaneously at the time with the times. Scooter may have some of that, because I was busy running in and out of the room. I know that I was on the desk sometimes (inaudible). I can't really tell you exactly.

And that there was sort of a confusing period in there, because I remember they made a decision that he would make a statement at Barksdale before -- which he did -- before he went to Offutt. I mean, there was a lot of discussion about that and how was it going to be done; a certain amount of to-ing-and-fro-ing and confusion about exactly when he was going to do it and how he was going to do it. So I don't really know exactly when that decision was made. I do know that we had this report (inaudible) possibly Air Force One, I think before that decision was made. I'm pretty sure of that.

**Q** So that -- what I'm looking for is whether that affected the Vice President's judgment about --

**MR. EDELMAN:** I think he definitely had that on his mind. I'm sorry, I have got to run.

**Q** That's all right. What I'd like to do, if I can, is be able to get back to you on the phone, just to (inaudible), like a five-minute chat, (inaudible) times. Is that going to -- I'm going to back (inaudible) notes, (inaudible) together in an outline. As I do that, (inaudible).

But this is good for (inaudible), I appreciate it. And I guess I'll see your boss tomorrow, and I'm going to see Hadley and Rice, (inaudible).

**MR. EDELMAN:** Scooter?

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Q Okay. Tomorrow at 11:00 a.m. And then, you know, Mary gave me a list of people to talk to, and I'm just going to look down the list.

MR. EDELMAN: All right, well, I hope this was helpful.

Q It was. It was. It definitely -- it's very helpful.

END

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