

CONTINUITY OF OPERATIONS

Interview #3

Friday, December 1, 2006

RITCHIE: The last time we talked about the various sergeants at arms you worked for over the years. We got up to Greg Casey, before Jim Ziglar came in. I wondered if we could start by your telling me about Jim Ziglar. I know he was important in your career, but what made him stand out among the sergeants at arms with whom you worked?

JOHNSON: So many wonderful things come to my head when I think of Mr. Ziglar. As a matter of fact, I was just talking about him at home last night. One of my hobbies is I'm a neon glass bender, so I make neon lights. I made a neon sign for Mr. Ziglar with his initials in neon, but I never got a chance to give it to him. When I run across him in the halls he asks, "Have you still got that light for me, Mike?" I say, "Yes, sir." His birthday is coming up soon. Mine is December 6th and I know his is the 9th or the 12th, somewhere around there in December, and I plan to go see him and give him this memento.

But so many good things come to mind when I think of Mr. Ziglar. I would say of the top three sergeants at arms that I've worked for, he is definitely in that number. He was one of the most intelligent people I've ever met. He was an astute, quick learner. He could grasp things when you briefed him, he could get it in a heartbeat. The other thing I liked about him was he always made you feel welcome when you talked to him. He always made you feel relaxed. He was, I would say, real passionate about that job, and what he was responsible for as the Senate sergeant at arms. He took it very seriously. He made sure that he had the right people in the right places. He also didn't necessarily rely on one person's opinion when he was looking for an answer. He would kind of poll people. If you gave him an answer he'd trust but verify. That's what I liked about him. He did his homework. He was just a really great leader. Again, he wasn't a manager in that position, he was a leader, he led that organization. So when I think about Mr. Ziglar I think about words like integrity, very intelligent, very astute, very passionate about his work, and a very good person. He had a good heart, and a good soul, and I could tell that.

When I think of his administration, a lot of things come to mind. He wanted to

make sure that we had the right tools to do the right job at the right time. He wasn't afraid to make sure you had that. He was, in fact, the sergeant at arms that promoted me from acting to director of program management. I had worked as a senior program manager under Mr. Casey, when that office was created under his reorg. Going into the next administration with Mr. Ziglar, he was the one that picked me for that job. He said, "I know you can do this job. You're the guy I want." Although I had submitted my name and then I withdrew it. I withdrew it, Don, because I felt that the cards were stacked against me. I just kind of felt that with the way the interview panel was set up, it was stacked against me. So when I went for the initial interview with the panel, I respectfully at the very beginning said, "I'm withdrawing my name, but I appreciate the opportunity to come and interview with you all."

Mr. Ziglar got word of that, right after I declined to go through the interview, and called me to his office. He said, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, sir, I don't have a really good feeling about this whole interview process." He said, "Mike, you have done great things. You have struggled. You've come a long way. Why would you want to give up now? This is an opportunity for you to get a director's position," which was something he knew I had been wanting for a long time. He talked to me. He talked me into going back. He said, "I would like you to reconsider going back for an interview. You're a strong candidate. You're a strong contender." And I did, based on that conversation with him.

So that was the kind of guy he was. When he recognized talent, he knew it right off. He had that intuition. It didn't matter who you were, he could read people very well. Subsequently, years down the road I ran into some folks who knew him who said that he did the same thing at Price Waterhouse, when he was a managing attorney there. That led me to believe—and I always knew it anyway—that Mr. Ziglar was just a genuine person, and you really don't run across that type of person that much these days.

RITCHIE: In your first interview you said that he came to you and said he wanted to leave a legacy of doing a continuity plan. That was pretty remarkable that he thought of that before September 11. Why was he thinking about that as an issue then?

JOHNSON: Well, it was actually a bipartisan directive given to the Police Board, and at the time, he was chairman of the board. This bipartisan directive was

issued in September of 2000 by the Speaker of the House, majority leader of the House, and the majority and minority leaders of the Senate. The four signatures on that letter directed the Capitol Police Board to develop a—they didn't call it a continuity plan, they called and said that we needed to ensure that the Senate could operate under any circumstances, and therefore we needed to have plans in place and they were tasking the Police Board to do that. That was mainly what initiated that. Now, I'm quite sure that there were talks, as you and I know there are always talks behind the scenes and in the private quarters, of what needs to be done, and I'm quite sure Mr. Ziglar was privy to that. This was more of a formality, to formalize it so that in going forward it wouldn't look like this was something that he just threw together. That letter, I think, prompted him to act. The letter is dated September 2000.

Mr. Ziglar had one of his executive assistants working on that project for about three months, up until about January 2001, and then he approached me and said, "Mike, I'm leaving the Senate this summer. One of the legacies I want to leave in the Senate is to get this plan written." He showed me the bipartisan directive that mandated these plans be developed, both in the House and the Senate. He said, "I think you can do this. As my director of program management, I would like you to do this for me." Then he explained that he had one of his executive assistants working on it, but that he wanted to make sure it got completed before he left, and this person was working on a lot of other initiatives. He wanted one person to focus on it, and he tasked me to do that.

Of course, at that time, Don, I was a good program manager, I had a great IT background, but didn't know anything about continuity planning, didn't know anything about emergency preparedness planning, and definitely did not know how to write one for an institution like the Senate. I was in awe that he asked me to do it, but on the same token I had reservations because I didn't have the experience. That's when he just said, "I know you can do this, Mike, I've got all the confidence in the world. But you've only got six months. I need it by June."

RITCHIE: How did you go about researching an issue that complex?

JOHNSON: It really wasn't too difficult. The first thing I did, being a seasoned and trained program manager, was to put together a high-performance project team. I had the requirement letter to get everyone excited about developing this plan. I needed a

team, and I needed funding assistance. I didn't think I needed a budget, because we weren't buying a product. We were writing a plan. But I needed a team to help me amass the information. There was a gentleman who is currently head of Senate Security for the secretary of the Senate [Michael diSilvestro] who was tasked to work with me to develop the secretary's continuity plan at the same time. He joined my team, and then I had others join my team from within the sergeant of arms organization. I put together a team of about ten folks, and I was the project team leader.

In addition, I added David Vignolo to the project team. He was a staffer in my program management department who I knew was detail-oriented and a good writer. I think he was an English major in college. This proved to be a very good decision because David helped me a lot with writing, editing, and collating the plan chapters and sections. In fact, he liked it so much that he changed his career goals to pursue a career in continuity planning. When I moved over to help create the sergeant at arms Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness, and headed up the continuity planning section of that department, he applied for a position in this department. He became certified in business continuity planning through the Disaster Recovery Institute of DRI. He's currently the continuity program manager for the Senate sergeant at arms and is responsible for assisting Senate offices and committees with writing and maintaining continuity of operations (COOP) plans.

The first thing we did was take Mr. Ziglar's suggestion and contact the executive branch to see how they wrote continuity plans. We also looked at best practices to see who else were developing these plans. We've got two other branches, the executive and the judiciary branches, so the first thing that I did was to contact the General Services Administration, as Mr. Ziglar suggested. "There's an acronym called COOP planning, which stands for Continuity of Operations," we asked GSA what were they doing in that arena. "What have they done? What plans have they developed? We'd like to come and talk to you." That's what got the ball started. They had been doing this for a long time, because they have succession planning in the executive branch. So it wasn't new to them. They said, "Sure, we'd be happy to talk to you." That was the point where I did need a budget because to get the people assigned to work with me, I had to reimburse them, so I established an interagency agreement with the GSA administration. So now I had one or two GSA staffers assigned to my team as well.

Linda Grinnage from GSA was another key player on my team because she brought to the table her resources from GSA, including providing my team with the original template that we used to develop the plan, knowledge of how to write the plan, examples of plans GSA had written, and resources to help me write and edit the plan. She was a wonderful addition to my team, and to this day I appreciate her efforts and contributions in publishing the first COOP plan for the Senate.

RITCHIE: What kind of issues were you dealing with?

JOHNSON: I was dealing with a multitude of issues involving the project team and writing the plan itself. Let's take the project management issues first. I was dealing with issues such as getting the interagency agreement between the legislative branch (the Senate) and the executive branch (the General Services Administration) established without delay because time was limited. I was dealing with the fact that nobody on the team had ever written a COOP plan except Linda, so the majority of my team members had a huge learning curve to overcome. I dealt with issues such as how much training we will need to acquire before we can start writing the plan; how do I get the sergeant at arms departments to provide me with their input since it wasn't one of their primary duties; how do I keep the project moving so I can meet the deadline; and how do I ensure that Michael DiSilverstro had what he needed to write the secretary of the Senate plan as well? There were a multitude of issues and long work hours that I had to contend with in completing the important but complex project. In addition, I had to be creative in keeping Mr. Ziglar apprised of my progress, since he was busy running the entire organization.

With regard to the issues pertaining to the plan itself, the first important issue that we as a team decided to address was: Where would the Senate go to deliberate if the Senate Chamber was unusable for some reason or another, such as a fire? It didn't have to be a terrorist attack that rendered it inoperable. The chamber could simply be under renovation to be deemed unusable. So this issue we labeled as "Developing an Alternate Senate Chamber." Other issues regarding the plan had to do with what happens when we have a "localized incident" that affects a small area of the Capitol or an area within one of our office buildings. The next issue had to do with what to plan for during a "wide-scale incident" that affects the entire Capitol or Senate office buildings, separately or at the same time.

Other issues I had to deal with were how do we notify or communicate with senators and staff when an incident occurs; how do we respond in the first twelve hours of an incident; how do we identify the “vital records” that the Senate would need during an incident; and many other issues as well.

So my first focus was to find an alternate chamber for the Senate. We needed an alternate chamber established, identified, and approved. Then everything else that supports that chamber needed to be developed next—everything that I learned from my years as a page, working in the cloakroom, working on the floor, working in the senators’ offices, I knew supported the Senate Chamber. Everything else would need to be planned next, so this was my starting point.

RITCHIE: What was the hardest part of that job?

JOHNSON: The hardest part of that job was not knowing whether I was doing it right, because I had never done it before. But with the help of GSA, I used their templates, I modified them—and when I say “I,” it was a team effort, I was the project manager but I had people helping me. We modified the template to fit the Senate and the legislative branch because the template we were using was geared toward the executive branch, and of course we operate differently. So the hardest part was not knowing whether I was doing it right, and the other hard part was meeting the project deadline. I knew I couldn’t miss it. I had never missed an important project deadline in my career, and I wasn’t about to start now with something as important as this assignment.

The project team gelled together. There were differences but I would like to think that my personality and participatory-management style aided me in identifying and resolving disputes or differences of opinion. Furthermore, these skills allowed me to make sure that we were one team moving in one direction. In my opinion, the optimum membership for a project team is five to seven members. If you have more than that—I had ten members—it’s more difficult to manage. Although I had a large project team, I was able to keep everyone moving in the same direction.

RITCHIE: I wondered, because on Capitol Hill there are many fiefdoms. You have the Office of Senate Security, the Capitol Police, all of these groups. Did you ever encounter any resistance from people who thought that they were already taking care of

things?

JOHNSON: Interestingly enough, not much. The reason I think was because I asked Mr. Ziglar to issue an announcement to all department directors that I would be leading his project and how important it was to him and the Senate that I receive their full cooperation. I also did not run into a lot of resistance because people could see that I was a confident project leader, but I would not hesitate to escalate issues above my level when needed. Remember, this task was coming from the Senate leadership and the Capitol Police Board, so if someone said, "I don't have time to do this, Mike, I have other priorities," I would remind them of our mission, share the bipartisan agreement with them, and help them resolve the priority conflict.

The focus was on the survivability of the U.S. Senate under any circumstances. We had the directive, so everyone involved came together for the common goal. I had a representative from the Capitol Police and the Senate Security Office on the team. I had a person from GSA on my team. GSA also used a private contractor to assist us. When difficulties arise, I would just—not in an intimidating way—talk to the person to help resolve the issue quickly. I would also encourage my team members by reminding them about this great opportunity for completing this assignment because it had never been done before now. "The leadership is asking us to do this. This is not about Mike Johnson or any one of us on this team." I would elevate the goal above a single individual and encourage everyone to cooperate for the good of the institution. And people just fell in line. It was a great achievement!

RITCHIE: So you finished this plan around May or June?

JOHNSON: Mr. Ziglar wanted it completed by June 2001, and around the second week of May, I delivered to him the plan in three large binders and in CD format—I don't know the total number of pages it consisted of. The plan was divided into a COOP plan for each sergeant at arms department. In addition, a similar plan was completed and presented to the secretary of the Senate about the same time. These were big thick binders. These were even bigger than those black binders on your bookshelves.

I had them place the plan on a compact disk for him so he didn't have to carry the binders around. He said, "You're finished?" I said, "Yes, sir, this is what you asked for."

He said, "Wow!" He was just elated. The first thing he said was, "I knew you could do it, Mike." I said, "Thank you, sir, I can't take all the credit. I was the leader of a great project team, who helped me." I also wanted to recognize Mike diSilvestro, head of Senate Security, he was a key partner in this. Dave Vignola did a great job with helping me write and edit the plan.

RITCHIE: Well, you submitted the report in May 2001, and then September came along. When you began to realize what was happening on September 11, what did you think in terms of having studied the continuity of operations?

JOHNSON: Oh, let me just make another point in terms of the plan itself. Although the bipartisan directive was mandated by the leadership of both the House and the Senate, the House was working on their plan at the same time. They used a contractor to help write their plan. We contemplated doing the same thing, but decided against it. Mr. Ziglar was very foresighted, in making sure the secretary of the Senate was included in this effort. He told me, "Now, when you write this plan, we have to make sure that the secretary participates." By having Mike D. on my team, and working with us when we produced the plan for the sergeant at arms, we equally produced a plan for the secretary of the Senate, which a lot of people don't know. There were two plans that were delivered.

RITCHIE: That makes sense, since they both have a lot to do with what goes on on the floor of the Senate.

JOHNSON: Exactly, the sergeant at arms with security and protocol and the Secretary of the Senate with the legislation and the chamber operations, notwithstanding the party secretaries' rolls. So I had to digress to clarify that, that it wasn't just one plan for the sergeant at arms, but we produced two plans and we've been walking in lock-step ever since then, when it comes to COOP planning in the Senate.

RITCHIE: You mentioned that the House contracted theirs out. When they got their report, was it similar to yours?

JOHNSON: It was not, and as a matter of fact—I don't know this to be true today—but I don't think it ever became a living and breathing document like ours did. We update ours as needed, but at least every two years. I satisfied the near-term

requirements to complete a plan for the sergeant at arms within six months, and I promised a long-term strategy to take our plan to the next level for the sergeant at arms, which was to have each Senate office write a plan. I had a very aggressive project plan for this initiative. I was not just thinking about what I was tasked to do, I thought ahead and mapped out a plan for years to come. I don't think the House followed this strategy, because they had a contractor write their plan. I believe our plan was very functional—not to say the House's wasn't, but when I got a copy of their plan to compare, it didn't have the depth of what we wrote. I think part of the reason was the people who wrote it didn't work in the House. They were contractors, whereas Senate staff wrote our plan. Who best to write it than the people who work here and have to keep the institution running? I think that was the difference.

RITCHIE: Knowing the peculiarities of the institution helps a lot.

JOHNSON: Knowing the peculiarities of the institution, absolutely. You had asked me another question.

RITCHIE: About September 11th. When that was happening, what was your reaction? What were your thoughts about that whole continuity process?

JOHNSON: I was sitting in a meeting when the first plane hit the Towers. Someone ran down the hall and said, "A plane just flew into the World Trade Center." I thought, what? We all thought it was an accident, so we continued our meeting, but others were turning on the TV. I left the meeting and went back to my office to turn on my television to watch the news, and another plane hit, and I watched that. At that point, we all knew that this was no accident. Not two planes in the same Towers. People just started self-evacuating.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Lenhardt had just been sworn in a few days before. He had only been on the job for six or seven days when this happened. The first thing I thought about was to contact the sergeant at arms to see if he was activating the COOP plan. When the sergeant at arms activates the plan, there is a position called the "COOP Action Officer" for the Senate, who is responsible for implementing the plan. And that was me.

The first thing I did was grab a CD with a copy of the plan and went to the Capitol Police headquarters, where I knew Mr. Lenhardt was with the leadership. Other senators were going there as well. The irony of it was I couldn't get in the building! Here I was with the continuity plan for the U.S. Senate, and I couldn't even get in the police headquarters where the decisions were being made! There was an officer on the outer perimeter that they had set up around police headquarters who recognized me. I think he was a lieutenant. He said, "Mike Johnson, he works for Mr. Lenhardt, let him through." That was how I got in.

When I got through the barricade, I went up to the seventh floor where the sergeant at arms and the others were meeting with leadership, and when I got a moment to speak with Mr. Lenhardt, I said, "Sir, are we activating the COOP plan?" He said, "Hold up for that right now, Mike, we're still trying to gather information." Now, there was chaos going on outside on the street due to the mass evacuation. People were self-evacuating. Traffic was all tied up. As a matter of fact, my significant other, Ms. Thirise Brown, the Web and network administrator for Senator [Blanche] Lincoln, was passing me in her car as I was going to police headquarters. She said, "Where are you going? I'm going home." I told Thirise that "I've got to work. I can't go home. I'm the COOP action officer." She said, "Okay, I'll see you at home." I stayed up there the entire day, waiting for word regarding the plan—when and if he was activating the COOP plan. Should he activate a portion of it? Should he activate all of it? I sat there and waited.

I know you probably heard this when you did the interviews with the telephone operators, I'm not sure if Barbara [Loughery] or Martha [Fletcher] talked about this—I know both of them very well, but that was the only time in the history of the exchange that it ever shut down. To make a long story short, we never activated the sergeant at arms COOP plan that day because it was determined that the Senate was okay and it was only a mass evacuation. There were no damages to our buildings or to the chamber. So Mr. Lenhardt tasked me with going back to Postal Square and assist with getting the Capitol telephone exchange opened back up. That was a challenge in itself. He had another one of his executive assistants who went over with me and we just started calling operators at home to get them to come back to work, because the Postal Square building had evacuated everybody out. A lot of the Capitol operators that I called said they couldn't get back into the city because of the barricades. The D.C. police department was allowing people to leave the city, but they weren't letting anyone but law enforcement

and medical personnel come back in the city, because they didn't know what was going on. So my colleague and I coordinated getting police escorts for some of the operators to get back into the city. While we waited for operators to arrive, along with volunteers from the secretary of the Senate's office answered the Capitol Exchange phones. I think Dave Tinsley and Dan Kulnis were some of the volunteers from the secretary's office who helped us. It was truly a team effort and I was happy to be part of it. We had to answer the phones just like the Capitol operators do, "U.S. Capitol, may I help you?" I quickly went from being a COOP Action Officer to an adhoc Capitol telephone operator.

I'm laughing now, but it was a very intense time. And it was a very long day for me. I normally get to work at 6:30 in the morning, and I didn't leave until about 12:30 the next morning, September 12th. That still wasn't as long as some of my page days.

RITCHIE: And the remarkable thing was the very next day the Senate was in session. They had police barricades all around the building, but they came back into session. What was the discussion at that point about continuity of operations? Although they didn't have to move out of the chamber, did they begin discussing at that stage the emergency circumstances?

JOHNSON: Yes, as I recall, the very next day, when they came back into session, there was a lot of discussion going on in the Capitol that I wasn't privy to, I wasn't part of that, but I was still on standby in terms of whether or not I needed to activate the alternate chamber. In the plan, we had identified an alternate chamber, but it was not completed. We had it approved by the Senate Rules Committee. The sergeant at arms signed off on the plan, but I didn't have the alternate chamber built. I had the location. I had it identified and approved. But I didn't have it ready for prime time. So the discussion that day was more or less trying to find out what had happened in New York, what had happened with the plane going down in Pennsylvania, what had happened at the Pentagon. It was more—I won't say damage control, it was still more information gathering. I was still on the sidelines, but the talk of activating COOP had subsided.

Now, I forgot to tell you that the COOP plan I delivered to Mr. Ziglar had some major recommendations in it. It didn't just cover our executive operations. It covered the Page School and dorm, and the secretary of the Senate likewise. It covered the Disbursing Office operations, and the Stationery Room. It covered the Senate clerks,

such as Dave Tinsley [Legislative Clerk].

RITCHIE: And the pages, they were put on buses and sent over to Colonial Beach on the Chesapeake, or someplace like that.

JOHNSON: Yes, they evacuated the pages, I don't recall where. Elizabeth Roach, the proctor, took them. I can't recall where, but that was what their evacuation plan called for. They had the police officer on the bus with them.

RITCHIE: It was good for the pages and it was good for their parents. It got them out of town and took their minds off of what was going on, and got everybody relieved.

JOHNSON: Right, the kids were safe. Most people who work in the Senate probably don't know, and even at that time didn't know that we had a continuity plan, because it had not been advertised. It had not been disseminated. It was only between May and September, four months, it was brand new and so a lot of people didn't know we had that plan. But we were ready.

RITCHIE: Well, that was September. The next month [October 2001], this whole building [Hart Senate Office Building] shut down because of an anthrax attack. That was in many ways much more disruptive of the Senate's business than September 11th, which was a distant threat that never arrived. But the anthrax was in the building, shut down all of the buildings for a couple of days, and shut this building down for three months, which was definitely a situation for continuity of operations.

JOHNSON: Exactly, and when that happened in October, we all thought, "What else is going to happen?" But that was real. It wasn't perceived. It wasn't external. It was right here on our campus, and that's when the Senate Disbursing Office and the Page School did activate their COOP plans. My role as the COOP action officer then was to put together an emergency operations center for the sergeant at arms office. Also my role was to work with the Senate Rules Committee, particularly Kennie Gill, who was staff director at the time, to find alternate office space for the Senate staff who were displaced from Hart. What I didn't know at the time but I soon found out was that 50 percent of the senators' offices were located in the Hart office building. Fifty percent? Mr. Lenhardt

said, "Yeah, Mike, and we've got to find them alternate office space. Now, here we are in '06 and that's a big part of our plan now. Back in those days, when we wrote the plan, it was—I won't say a distant concept, but it was something we had not finished planning for. We hadn't drilled down to that level yet. The biggest challenge for myself and the continuity folks, and the Rules Committee staff working with Mr. Lenhardt, was finding alternate office space and making sure that these offices could continue work.

One thing I'll also say, Don, and a lot of people have either forgotten or don't know, or don't want to give my team credit for, but a major recommendation in the COOP executive plan summary was that in our assessment of how to continue business, we needed an alternate chamber. We worked through so many issues. That was just the starting point. Another major recommendation was that we needed an alternate computer facility (ACF). Today we have that facility, but a lot of people don't know that the concept and recommendations for that facility came out of the first continuity plan that was written for the Senate. People think the IT guys thought of this. It was my team that said we need to have one in the event that our main computer room and main frame were taken out, for whatever reason, fire and things like that, that we have a facility to back up our computers. This recommendation was adopted and that's why the Senate has an ACF today. Another thing I'll point out is that when we made that recommendation, Mr. Ziglar worked with the Senate leadership to get funding put into the next year's appropriations bill, so the facility could be acquired. Afterwards, other legislative branch entities saw our request and said, "The Senate has asked for money for an alternate computer facility. We would like to be included in that effort We need the same thing." Then the House joined in, although I don't believe this idea was in their COOP plan, and the rest as they say is history because everybody said, "We want a piece of that." To this day, we have the Library of Congress, GAO, GPO, AOC, House, and Senate operations included in the ACF, but it was the Senate's initial concept.

RITCHIE: Well, the computers saved everybody, because we walked out the door in October 2001 without a single book or any of our files or other paperwork, but within days we had a computer hooked up at a desk in the Russell Building. We could get our e-mail. We could get anything that was online. If it hadn't been for that it would have been hard to do any work for three months. We had limited space—one desk for the entire office—but the computer enabled us to function.

JOHNSON: Right. What we did during the anthrax attack was work with the Rules Committee to identify and acquire alternative office space in the Postal Square building for the Senate offices to use. Simultaneously, the Rules Committee identified vacant space in committee and conference rooms in the Dirksen and Russell buildings for other displaced staff from the Hart Building to use. The extended campus set up at Postal Square that offices used could accommodate two people per office, and worked well. Keep in mind that many offices transferred the workload and other responsibilities to their state offices or staff just worked from home and some telecommuted. We also worked with the Rules Committee to get authorization to enter into a short-term lease agreement with the General Services Administration to obtain additional office space on the fourth floor of Postal Square. So, the lessons learned and experience that we obtained from developing our first ever COOP plan were benefitting us while we recovered from the incident.

RITCHIE: You were building on it.

JOHNSON: Yes, we were building on our COOP plan, that's exactly what we were doing.

RITCHIE: As all this was happening, how did the continuity plan evolve? Obviously, now everybody realized how important the issue was, and it had these new layers added onto it. What was the next step after that?

JOHNSON: The next step in my mind was for me, since I was leading this effort for the sergeant at arms office, to develop a strategy to assist each Senate office to write a COOP plan for their operation. As you know, each senator's office is like a small corporation in the Senate. Therefore, each office needed to have a COOP plan to ensure the office could function under any circumstance. The anthrax incident that displaced 50 percent of the senators' offices for three months was evidence that this was the logical next step, which I had previously identified. The additional goals that I had for COOP planning in the Senate were as follows:

1. Complete a COOP plan for each senator's office.
2. Complete a COOP plan for each Senate committee.
3. Complete a "gap analysis" of the sergeant at arms and secretary of the Senate

- COOP plans to identify what was missing.
4. Complete the build-out of the Senate Alternative Chamber on Capitol Hill.
 5. Identify and acquire an Alternative Senate Chamber off Capitol Hill.
 6. Expand and plan to include provisions for an Alternate Senate office building for use during a long-term incident that closes one of our buildings.
 7. Complete a COOP Emergency Communications Plan so we'll have primary and backup communications equipment and protocols established for an incident.
 8. Complete a COOP Emergency Transportation Plan for the Senate.

Furthermore, I wanted to acquire funds so that I could establish an ongoing Test, Training, and Exercise (TT&E) program to allow us to periodically test our plans, conduct drills for setting up our alternate facilities, and train our COOP personnel.

I briefed these goals and objectives to Mr. Lenhardt. He recommended that we proceed, but remember to “crawl, walk, and run” as we moved forward with these goals. So that’s been a motto for me when executing my duties as deputy sergeant at arms for security and emergency preparedness.

Mr. Lenhardt also introduced me to the concentric circles concept: Let’s build our plans out, starting from the hub of Capitol Hill and out. And that’s what I have done. I started taking the plans to the next level. I started to acquire and build-out the facilities, and get the facilities ready, and request the budget to do that. I had no budget to act on any of these plans, and at the time we didn’t have a Chief Information Officer (CIO), one central person responsible for all the IT stuff. I think there was a director or two, but there wasn’t a centralized person responsible for the ACF, so later on a CIO was hired by Mr. Pickle. His name is Greg Hanson. We became good friends, since he started working with us. So the next logical step was, “Okay, let’s start implementing some of these recommendations in this plan. Let’s review it and test it.” Mr. Lenhardt and Jeri Thomson, the secretary of the Senate at that time, were saying, “We’re going to move on some of these recommendations, but what we’re also going to do is do an assessment of our vulnerabilities in the Senate,” both physical and technical vulnerabilities, or whatever else we need to look at.

Mr. Lenhardt then commissioned the Legislative Branch Emergency Preparedness Task Force, LBEPTF. He created this task force and hired a gentleman who currently

today works for the Capitol Police, Richard Majauskas, and asked him—he had prior military experience—to lead this team as the director. Lenhardt put me on this team along with Mike DiSilvestro, from the Office of Senate Security. Remember, Mike and I had worked together in creating the original COOP plans for the secretary of the Senate and the sergeant at arms. He tasked us with doing a study of our vulnerabilities and looking at what we could fix immediately. The director used to call it—and it was the first time I heard the term—“low-hanging fruit.” He said, “We’re going to pick the low-hanging fruit. We’re going to fix what we can fix right away as we conduct the study. We’re going to recommend solutions for the different vulnerabilities and present it to the leadership and to our bosses.” That’s what we did.

For the next three months, I worked on the task force and also assisted with the anthrax response. I learned a lot while working on this task force, conducting the vulnerability analysis of the Senate campus. We completed that in December of 2001. After the report was provided to Mr. Lenhardt, he created an office that was responsible for the continuity and emergency preparedness business of the Senate from a security perspective, but not as first-responders, because that’s the Capitol Police’s job. He needed staff who could permanently address these and other security issues for the Senate. He wanted to make sure that the planning was going on, that evaluation and preparation continued. So in January 2002, the report was disseminated to the leadership and other Senate officials. Mr. Lenhardt recommended to the leadership that the Office of Senate Security and Emergency Preparedness be created. He called me into his office and said, “I know you are director of program management, and you produced the first continuity plan for the Senate. How would you like to come over and work in a new office I’m creating called the Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness?”

Me being an old IT guy, I immediately started thinking acronyms, because in the IT world everything is an acronym. Most people know that the word LAN is an acronym, and it stands for Local Area Network. The first thing I thought of was Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness? I said, “OSEP.” Like that, and he said, “Yeah, OSEP.” I said, “Wherever you need me, sir, I’m ready.” He said, “Okay, I’d like you to vacate the director of program management duties and come over and work in this office I’m creating and help build this office.” So that’s what I did. Those were the next steps: Look at low-hanging fruit, what we could fix right now, look at our long-term objectives, and create this office.

My experience in the Senate was then more valuable than ever, because I had worked on the floor. I had worked in the cloakroom. I knew how the floor operated. I had to work with the party secretaries in looking at the chamber operations. I had been a telecom manager, responsible for the Capitol Police radio system and equipment. I was the one, I think I mentioned earlier, to put in the radiax cable over in the Rayburn building, and the leaky cable, to increase coverage for their portable radios, so I knew where some of the vulnerability was. I had worked in the IT field, so I knew where some of our vulnerabilities were. But Rick and Lenhardt also brought in teams from outside, from other organizations, to help us with the study. And that's what we did. It just came together beautifully and I was glad to be a part of it. One of the certificates I brought to show you was after we did the first exercise of the Alternate Chamber. Mr. Lenhardt shared the task force report with the leadership and other senators, and Senator [Mary] Landrieu spoke about our team on the floor and gave us kudos in the *Congressional Record* on December 19, 2001. She talked about our task force and what we had accomplished. It mentioned all of our names. That was really nice that she did that for us.

RITCHIE: Were you hearing from any of the senators while all of this was going on? Did they have opinions about what should be done? Senators usually aren't shy about expressing their opinions.

JOHNSON: No, they're not shy. [laughs] I did not personally hear from them but I do know that Mr. Lenhardt was in constant conversations with the leadership, Senator [Tom] Daschle and Senator Lott, and other senators. I know that he had inquiries from senators who had experience and backgrounds in this area. Although I did not interface directly with the senators, unless we were briefing them. So the SAA would tell us which senator was concerned about a particular issue. We were trying to make changes rapidly to secure the campus and to make sure that everyone was safe.

RITCHIE: I know some of the senators were pretty indignant about this building being closed for so long. They wanted to get back in here and couldn't understand why it was taking so long, and I'm sure that they had strong opinions about what needed to be done.

JOHNSON: Yes, they did, and I heard some of that. I heard of senators—and this was just hearsay and not something I can substantiate—but I heard that there were senators who said, “Get that building open.” We were under the radar scope. The Hart Building was closed for about three months. We were under pressure to get the building open. It’s my understanding that at the same time the Hart was attacked, the same thing happened in Florida, that building was deemed unusable and torn down. The Hart Building being a new building, that was not an option, so these speciality teams that were brought in, and the excellent work that the office of the attending physician, Dr. [John F.] Eisold and his team did, it was just remarkable. It was just remarkable to see these teams of experts working together, hand in hand. I think there were a lot of opinions from senators. There were also senators I heard that were concerned—and rightfully so—with some of the expensive art was on loan to their offices, and that they wanted to save. They didn’t want it to be destroyed by the cleaning chemicals. They were concerned about that. They were concerned about a lot of things, but mainly would their staff be safe when the building was reopened. I also think most of all that the senators were grateful that no one died from that attack on the Senate Hart Building.

RITCHIE: Yes, when you consider the alternatives, the consequences could have been pretty severe.

JOHNSON: Far worse, yes.

RITCHIE: At the same time this was going on, the Visitor Center [CVC] was being constructed on the east front [of the Capitol]. Did any of your plans affect the way the Visitor Center was being constructed? Did that become factored into the issue of continuity and alternative meeting sites?

JOHNSON: There was some discussion and some consideration about using a section of portion of the CVC as an alternate chamber. They debated using the auditorium that they were building as a alternate chamber that could be used for joint sessions. But again, that was hearsay and I was not privy to that. That was being kept at a very high level. By the time it got down to me, I was just told to implement something. So the CVC didn’t have a huge impact, Don, on the continuity planning. At that time, after we got the Office of Security and Emergency Preparedness established, our focus was to continue to implement the recommendations that were approved that came out of

the COOP plan and that came out of the vulnerability analysis report that the task force wrote. In addition, our focus was to get some of these alternate facilities acquired and configured so that if we really had to use them, we could.

I was spending long hours working on the alternate chamber, and taking the plan to the next level. I also was working on a way to test the plan. There is a key component of continuity of operations planning called test, training, and exercise. Now, of course, in the Senate, that's easier said than done. I'm not going to walk into Senator Daschle, or Senator Reid, and say, "We're going to be doing some testing in the Senate Chamber, sir. You won't be able to use the chamber today." That ain't going to happen! We had to work around a lot of obstacles to begin to develop a test, training, and exercise program. The first test I managed and conducted was the alternate chamber on August 7, 2002. By that time I had the alternate chambers built out. The secretary of the Senate staff held a mock session in the alternate chamber. We went into a mock session with the clerks and the secretary of the Senate, and we passed this resolution. Jeri Thomson and Mr. Lenhardt kindly gave all of us a copy of it. It designates when we did the first continuity of operations exercise.

RITCHIE: So you held a mock session of the Senate in an alternative place and passed this resolution?

JOHNSON: In an alternate chamber, yes.

RITCHIE: Tested all the communications equipment—

JOHNSON: Exactly. Set up all the cloakrooms. Set up all the clerks' work stations, the official reporters, place for the press if the press would be allowed in during a real world incident. We had our doorkeepers. We had USCP chamber protective division. Yes, we made it look just like it was the Senate Chamber in the Capitol. At that time, the House had not begun to exercise at this level. We talked about the House in contrast earlier. The House was taking smaller steps. They were testing the alternate vote tally machines and the electronic equipment. They were buying and programing alternate laptops. We went for the bigger challenge. We said, we're going to do this exercise, and it just came together very well. I got a lot of kudos for a job well done since I led the effort, and I was really happy that it was successful. I also have a letter from Mr.

Lenhardt thanking me.

RITCHIE: Have you had any exercises since then?

JOHNSON: Yes, I have several every year now. As a matter of fact, this year I put together a guidance document for the sergeant at arms and the secretary of the Senate on the recurring exercise and training that needs to go on at all levels of our COOP facilities, and it's based on a senator's term, a six-year cycle. At the end of six years, we've cycled through all of the testing that we need to do such as communications to our facilities, to setting up alternate office space, to setting up briefing centers, and more. It's now beginning to become institutionalized, which is what I wanted.

RITCHIE: Well, especially now that we have whole leadership change coming up in the next Congress. Everyone from the majority and minority leaders to the sergeant at arms and secretary of the Senate is going to be different. You can't count on the continuity of the people who know what's going on, you're going to have to constantly keep briefing new people in those posts.

JOHNSON: Exactly, and we're prepared to do that. We're gearing up for those. As a matter of fact, I have an exercise coming up on the 18th of January to prepare COOP staff for the State of the Union address, a sort of dress rehearsal. It's a functional exercise where we will be walking some of the new leadership staff and probably Mr. [Terrence] Gainer, the new sergeant at arms, and Nancy Erickson, the new secretary through the exercise.

RITCHIE: So you'll do that just for the regular event, not to simulate an emergency off-site?

JOHNSON: Yes, exactly. Now, we can't use the Senate Chamber. We have done exercises in the Senate Chamber, but you probably know that you can't use the Senate Chamber for anything other than to pass laws. Permission must be granted to allow us to use it for exercises. It's really complicated. The sergeant at arms has to do a lot of coordination to make it happen. I manage the exercise program for the Senate, and I'm the exercise director for the January exercise. It's designated to testing our capabilities to stand up an emergency operation center and a leadership coordination

center in the event that something happens. But we dress rehearsal for situations like this. Again, we're not first responders, but we're the folks that have to sustain the operation, once the incident is contained and identified, to insure that operations continue, that laws can be passed, and that senators can deliberate and communicate with their constituents. So, yes, I'm planning several exercises right now.

RITCHIE: What have been the big lessons that you've taken away from this process? You were in it before everybody knew there was a problem through the point where everybody had been through the problem and knew that they had to address it. Now that we're five years beyond September 11th, what would you say are the most important things that you've learned from this process?

JOHNSON: I will put it in three words, if I may just quote Mr. Lenhardt: "Crawl, walk, run." I learned that I was crawling when I embarked on writing the first continuity plan. I didn't have a clue what I was doing but I got it done. I learned to walk while working on the task force and acquired the expertise to work with other security professionals. And one day, I'll be running to the point that I have everything in place that the Senate needs for business continuity. Then it's a matter of maintaining it. I'm not there yet. What I've also learned is that it takes people working together to make this all happen. It's really good to see senators like Senator Landrieu recognize the task force, and Senator Frist, and Senator Reid come to the sergeant at arms awards ceremony every year. I brought a couple of my service awards to show you. The senators recognized me and said, "We're the senators, but this place wouldn't run without you all, and we appreciate that." That goes a long way. I've learned that people working together can do almost anything that they want to do.

Furthermore, I learned—something I've always known—that the Senate is still a very conservative organization, that the wheels of the Senate turn slowly, that we don't move as fast, and that's good. I've watched some of the executive agencies that I've been dealing with on continuity issues move too fast. You can't just jump up there and start running. You've got to take your time. You've got to assess. You just can't move too fast. Some people may see that as not so good, but the more you work here, the more you appreciate that. It's good to have that energy and enthusiasm—"I've got to get it done!" But even with the changeover in the leadership, and the administrations, and the majority versus the minority, it's still the Senate. For us, it's the Senate. We're support staff.

We're not political. We support the one hundred senators, regardless of who is in the majority and who is in the minority. That has been entrenched in my mind. As long as I know that, and work that way, what I can contribute, the Senate will always be a great place.

RITCHIE: One thing that's always going to be a constant is that the Capitol is always going to be a target. The British burned it down, its been bombed several times, there are protest groups that congregate here. When people want to make a symbolic gesture, the Capitol comes to mind. That means they are always going to have to factor in that there will always be some sort of a threat.

JOHNSON: You're absolutely right, and my boss, Mr. Pickle, mentioned it in a *Roll Call* interview where he basically said, "The Capitol will always be a target because this is the people's house and it's a great symbol of democracy." We know that, those of us who work here. A lot of people know this and a lot of people don't, Don. Right after 9/11, and even in the following summer of '02, a lot of interns turned down jobs here because they didn't want to come here to work. People who were slated to come as interns and people who were working here said, "I'm going home. I don't want to work in a place that's a target. I don't want to live under this constant threat and fear." Because, of course, you mentioned 9/11 and anthrax, but we had the ricin incident as well. That put our teams into play. So there's always going to be something targeting us. The people that are working here are people that choose to work here, not because they have to but because they want to, if the institution wants them. That's remarkable. I find that fascinating.

This is also a good time to mention the current sergeant at arms, Mr. William H. Pickle, who is my boss. He is a great leader and has done a lot for the U.S. Senate. He retired as a Secret Service agent responsible for the vice presidential detail, so he knows security and continuity of operations all too well. He's been a great mentor to me and has allowed me to grow under his administration. When Mr. Pickle started, the OSEP operation was maturing, so he asked me to step up from doing just Continuity of Operations management to assisting with all the projects in this department. This includes physical security, life safety security or emergency preparedness as well as continuity of operations and continuity of government (COG) initiatives. As such, Mr. Pickle promoted me to deputy assistant sergeant at arms for the Office of Security and

Emergency Preparedness, and I'm grateful for the faith and confidence he has in me.

RITCHIE: Well, you've certainly built quite a life here, from the day you walked through the door selling newspapers.

JOHNSON: Speaking of that, I brought in my twenty-five year service award, and in July 2005 there's my thirty-year service award. I have pictures with the Senate sergeant at arms and the leadership giving me those awards. And as of December of this year it will be thirty-three years of service for the entire Senate. I joke with my significant other, Thirise Brown, I say, "Well, you know, they're still not counting my paperboy years!" [laughs]

RITCHIE: But that was part of the learning curve, too.

JOHNSON: That was part of the learning curve, but if they would count those years, my pension would be a lot bigger! No, but it's been an honorable experience and I've just been really lucky to be here. You know, Don, there's something that I think about a lot, and I thought about this when Richard [Baker] gave his presentation at the off-site [retreat for the sergeant at arms staff], which started all of this because he showed that picture of my previous boss, Mark Trice. When I think about my history in the Senate, I think a lot about the slaves who helped build the Capitol. There has been controversy over that issue the last five, seven, eight, nine years about the slaves that helped build the Capitol. Being of African American descent I sort of wonder sometimes, am I one of the souls that came back to this place after being reincarnated, where probably once I was here before, and maybe helped build this great landmark. But it has been a fantastic experience and I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world.

RITCHIE: Well, you've kept it running, that's for sure.

JOHNSON: [Laughs] Yes, I have, and hopefully I will continue to do that. I plan to be here at least until my retirement age, when I'm fifty-five and then maybe a year or two after that. I love the Senate and I love this institution. I love people like you, the people who work here, the people I've met and shared my life with and helped support this institution. Like I said, I wouldn't trade it for the world. I wouldn't trade it for any Microsoft or Ma Bell, or AT&T employment, it's just been a great experience for me.

RITCHIE: I thank you for sharing these memories with us as well. This has been a very positive contribution to our oral history collection.

JOHNSON: I want to thank you, too, Don, and Mr. Baker, for allowing me to participate in the oral history of the Senate. I'm glad that I was able to share some of my memories and mementos with you.

End of the Third Interview