

14 Lanier Avant is a staff director of the Committee on
15 Homeland Security. He's from Mississippi, another great
16 state of the United States. And he's actually was in
17 that position, of course had a very important oversight
18 role when this comes to scrutinizing the homeland
19 security in its various aspects. You have the floor,
20 sir.

21 MR. LANIER AVANT: Good morning. I want to just let you
22 know, Speaker Hastert, that, you know, I never thought
23 I'd follow you as a speaker, but I'll take my
24 opportunity today. Speaker Hastert mentioned about 9/11
25 and his perspective on it. If I could just reflect back

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1 for just a moment to 9/11, I was a junior level staffer
2 that day. I was working for Congressman Thompson, who
3 was also chair of the Homeland Security Committee at the
4 time. Well, he's chair now, but I was working for him
5 in his personal office at the time. And one of the
6 things that really stood out, first of all, I didn't
7 have a 7:00 meeting that morning so I was strolling into
8 the office about 8:30 or so. But I recall that after
9 people realized that we needed some kind of a response,
10 that this wasn't going to be a normal day, even though
11 we didn't have particulars of what was going on in New
12 York City or at the Pentagon, you know, people just
13 started to disperse. And some members of our leadership
14 in the Congress have certain places to go, but by and
15 large for the thousands of staff members and for the
16 hundreds of just rank and file members of Congress,
17 there was no plan in place, to be quite honest. So at
18 about 9:00 or 9:30 that morning there were people just
19 in the streets making themselves, in my estimation, more
20 vulnerable and being more of a target. So by about
21 10:30 Congressman Thompson and I and a few other
22 staffers found ourselves hanging out at the Democratic
23 Club on the hill. But the place was full. But one of
24 the lessons I think that we learned from that was that
25 we really do have to have a contingency plan and we have
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1 to work on that plan constantly to make sure it's
2 updated, to make sure it's effective, to make sure that
3 it's tested so that when an event happens we're
4 prepared. And unlike the thinking September 10 and
5 before, it's not "if" something happens, it's just a
6 matter of time. That's the kind of thinking that we try
7 to take into the position. And so I'd encourage all of
8 you to take that message back home in terms of
9 preparation.

10 Speaker Hastert also mentioned, touched on the issue of
11 jurisdiction in the Congress. Chairman Thompson was
12 appointed to the Homeland Security Committee when it was
13 initially stood up in 2003, and served on it ever since.
14 And in the time that he's been chairman of the committee
15 and also when he was ranking member just before he
16 became chair, one of the big battles we fought on a
17 daily basis and really we continue to fight is a
18 jurisdictional battle, just a battle within Congress for
19 power, a battle for control over who has the biggest
20 say-so on an issue, essentially what it boils down to.
21 And we exert a lot of staff resources, and the member
22 exerts a lot of his own energy too, in order to
23 consolidate that jurisdiction, to streamline it in a way
24 that doesn't create so many problems. In the U.S. what
25 we find is that certainly we have a very complex

1 Congress. But that complexity is sort of a double-edged
2 sword. On the one hand it lends itself to the kind of
3 stability that is hard to find around the world. You
4 know, there's not a single event or a single string of
5 events in many cases that could really disrupt the flow
6 of Congress because it's just such a complex
7 organization and our federal government is such a
8 complex organization as well. But the other side of
9 that sword is that that complexity can really lend
10 itself to a sort of complacency. And so when Congress
11 needs to act, many times there's just an enormous
12 inertia, and so we spend a lot of time trying to reduce
13 that or minimize that inertia. What we've found is that
14 sometimes catastrophic events give us the momentum that
15 we need. But that's just sort of learning by
16 experience. So we would say to our friends across the
17 Atlantic that you shouldn't have to wait on some
18 9/11-like event in order to sort of get your internal
19 house in order. We would encourage you to, you know, be
20 in a constant state of readiness, be in a constant state
21 of preparedness, examining your current systems, making
22 sure that you're using technology, for example, in the
23 best way possible to achieve whatever desired outcomes
24 you have, making sure that the parliaments are working
25 with the executive branches of your government in a way
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1 that is not necessarily adversarial, but certainly in a
2 way that challenges them to be the best they can be. In
3 the U.S. we see that as the role of the Congress. To
4 really challenge our administration, to make sure that
5 they're doing the best job they can. But the other side
6 of that is that we're also challenged with making sure
7 they have the resources to do the job. So as the
8 Speaker mentioned, we have power of the purse so to
9 speak, and Congress takes that role seriously. When it
10 comes to commercializing products, the Congress can
11 really be a leading indicator and really push the
12 inventory on that issue. In the ways that we draft some
13 of our laws and which issues we choose to highlight and
14 bring attention to, we know many times that the private
15 sector responds to what it is that we put in statute.
16 With that being said, we always have this constant
17 balancing act that we have to perform, and that's the
18 balance in terms of homeland security, the balance
19 between commerce and security. And that's an important
20 balance to maintain. One of the best examples I can
21 share with you is a little over two years ago when
22 Congress passed and the President signed the 9/11 bill,
23 one of the provisions we put in the bill required that
24 100 percent of our cargo inbound for the U.S. be
25 screened at a foreign port of entry. Well, that sounded
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1 real good. And I sat in a lot of meetings where we
2 talked about that. We met with a lot of stakeholders on
3 that issue. And at the end of the day we thought it
4 would be a good policy position to take. Speaker Pelosi
5 supported us in that so we were able to get that passed
6 and the President signed it.

7 Well, in hindsight it would have been much better if we
8 had talked to folks about it. Even though we had a lot
9 of stakeholder meetings, there were some of our
10 international partners that we probably could have
11 engaged and should have engaged a lot more than we did.
12 Certainly we respect the sovereignty of other nations,
13 and so you just can't be so heavy handed with folk.

14 Now, that being said, we've still got a security
15 interest that we're trying to maintain at home. Just
16 like 9/11, if some WMD for example were to somehow show
17 up at a U.S. port, you know, the public would overnight
18 just demand that we shut every port down in the country,
19 and that would really bring worldwide commerce to a
20 halt. And that's the situation that we want to avoid as
21 best we can. So how do we do that? We're trying to
22 maintain the balance by passing laws that take into
23 account the need for the flow of commerce but also
24 protect our citizens. And so that's sort of a constant
25 concern that we have. We also deal with the balancing
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1 act between homeland security and individual rights,
2 privacy and civil liberties. Many times they come into
3 conflict simply because a lot of people will put the
4 individual interest above what's in the best interest of
5 the greater public or the larger public. And that's not
6 to say that it's right or wrong, but it's just to say
7 it's a different approach and an approach that obviously
8 we take into consideration whenever we're drafting laws
9 that will affect the American people. And each day we
10 try more and more not to draft those laws in the absence
11 of thinking about how our neighbors around the world
12 will be impacted by them. So that's a lesson I think
13 that we're still really learning. But in terms of what
14 motivates the Congress to pass certain laws, I would
15 just offer than one of the lessons you all can learn
16 from the U.S. Congress is, again, not to allow some bad
17 experience to serve as your catalyst for creating change
18 within your own governments. That's we think a very
19 important lesson, and we just have to learn the hard
20 way, but as you go forward just take our word for it
21 that it's worth it if you do your own self-evaluation
22 and just stay in a constant state of readiness and
23 preparedness.