

## **“It’s Too Much Time to Lose”**

**Interviewee:** Eric Edelman

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**Project:** George W. Bush Oral History

Eric Edelman was principal deputy assistant to the vice president for national security affairs on September 11, 2001. He describes his task of telling Vice President Dick Cheney to relocate from the White House bunker to a remote continuity-of-government facility during the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Edelman reflects on that day and the vice president’s reluctance to move because he wanted to remain in contact with President George W. Bush.

**Eric Edelman:** [Stephen] Hadley sidled up to me and said, “You know, the Vice President is down in the bunker, and you need to go down and tell him Dick Clarke and I think he needs to relocate to a secure location,” one of the evacuation sites for continuity of government. He didn’t actually give me a note; it was an oral message. I think the interview said note, so just for the record it was an oral message, not a note.

So I actually was badged as emergency staff for continuity of government purposes. In case Scooter wasn’t around and the Vice President had to be evacuated, I would have been the national security person to be evacuated. But I had no idea where the Presidential Emergency Operations Center [PEOC] was; I’d never been down to it, so it took me a while to work my way down there and I got stopped by the uniformed Secret Service at several places. All of them had their Uzis out. Again, I have the right badge, but, “Who are you? Why are you here?” They finally called into the PEOC and said, “Eric Edelman is here,” and they said, “Let him in, for God’s sake.”

I went in and the Vice President was there, Scooter was there, a lot of people. Nick Calio was there, I think, who was the head of White House legislative affairs. Secretary [Norman] Mineta, the Secretary of Transportation, was down there.

**Interviewer:** What was it like?

**Edelman:** Condi came later; she was not there yet. It was extremely tense. While we were there—I think shortly before I got there the planes hit the World Trade Center. The timeline is a little bit vague in my head because it took me a while to get down there. Then once I was there the television was on. We were getting reports of car bombs by the State Department and elsewhere; those all turned out to be false reports.

So I went and gave Cheney the message and he said: “No, I’m not going to leave here.” He said, “I’ve established communications with the President here. If I leave now and I take a helicopter, it will be 45 minutes before we have communication again. That’s too much time to lose. This thing was built to withstand a nuclear blast. I’m going to stay here, so you go back and tell Hadley and Clarke that.”

*End of excerpt.*

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