

Sunday, October 1, 2006

After midnight on Saturday, a weary Congress staggered through the doors of the House to begin a five-week recess. A few hours later, Reps. Tim Bishop, Nita Lowey and I slumped into a taxi for Baltimore Washington Airport, and then slumped once more into our seats on a flight to Islip.

Figuring out how to get home after Congress adjourns is a mix of "Beat the Clock," "Survivor" and "The Amazing Kreskin." It requires prescience, persistence, patience and precision. What appears on the surface -- cast the last vote on the Floor, drive to the airport, take-off, land, drive home -- is actually a constant act of high speed juggling in multiple directions.

Consider last week:

We arrived in Washington on Monday, with the expectation of voting late into every evening, and concluding business "very late Friday night, possibly early Saturday morning."

By Thursday, the scheduling alerts that flash on every Member's blackberry grew ominous: "Members are advised that the House will not recess until business is completed...possibly late Saturday night." The word on one elevator was even more disturbing: "Maybe Sunday morning," I overheard.

By Thursday afternoon, the rumors turned in a better direction. The word on the Floor was that all business would end on Friday -- in time to make flights home. Since I don't like to spend an extra minute in DC, my long-suffering scheduler began her frenetic race to book me on every available passage from Capitol Hill to Dix Hills: the Delta and USAir Shuttles to LaGuardia, the Southwest flight into Islip, and, just in case a thunderstorm grounded planes, the Amtrak into Penn Station. (Want to know if thunderstorms are rolling into Washington? Forget the Weather Channel. Just call my scheduler and ask her what flight I have booked to NY. Whatever time that is, a thunder storm is almost guaranteed.)

I awoke Friday morning and cheerfully began packing for the five week recess. Bad move. Instead of preparing my baggage, I should have consulted my Blackberry. Then I would have seen the dreaded message: votes would occur well into Friday night, possibly all night. And into Saturday. And even late Saturday night. I called my daughters with the bad news. My older daughter had come home from college this weekend. She was on her way to Long Island. But not me. I was stuck in Washington.

All day Friday the news and schedule shifted. And so did my scheduler. She booked reservations first thing Saturday morning. She held reservations for Saturday night. And

Sunday. And everything in between.

As we approached Friday evening, an announcement was made: Congress would adjourn at about midnight. On my desk, my scheduler left an assortment of different airline boarding passes that looked like a deck of cards.

The gavel finally came down at midnight. I got up at six the next morning and headed back.

I write this aboard the Southwest Airlines flight to Islip. Reps. Bishop and Lowey are reading the newspapers and I've reflected on the week:

- I passed two bills in the House: the Long Island Sound Stewardship Act, which authorizes \$100 million for land acquisition and preservation along the Sound ([read my Floor speech here](#)); and a resolution for national awareness of myositis, an auto-immune disorder that causes painful inflammation of the muscles ([read my Floor speech here](#)).

-My efforts to promote religious tolerance in the military scored a partial victory. We succeeded in striking language from the Department of Defense budget that would have opened the door to coercion and proselytization, (although I am not fully satisfied with the compromise). ([Read my floor speech here](#)).

-There were some rough battles as well: we passed a military tribunals bill that allows the government to detain suspects indefinitely without trial; we passed a bill that allows the government to eavesdrop on communications without a warrant.

On both of those issues, I notice some hypocrisy. As I stated on the Floor ([click here](#)), when it comes to people planning genocide against my country, I want to find them, fight them, capture them, try them, and if they're found guilty, kill them. I support capital punishment for convicted terrorists. But I also know that governments make mistakes and they lose records. So I want some quality control. I support wiretaps on suspected terrorists, I just want a Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to make sure we're wiretapping the right suspect (it was recently disclosed that the Pentagon accidentally spied on a group of Quakers planning a protest demonstration). In the case of so-called detainees, I want a court making sure we didn't arrest and imprison the wrong person in the fog of war. I want to fight terrorists in the pursuit of our historic values, not theirs.

We begin our descent over Long Island. Washington and its busy week are behind me, and five weeks of district work period are ahead. I hope I'll have an opportunity to hear your views on the issues confronting our nation!

Posted by: SI