

Letters, Seattle Post-Intelligencer, February 6, 2008

It was a real surprise to find an editorial in the Tuesday P-I on the 9/11 Commission, the author of which did not bother to call the local member of that commission for his insights into Philip Shenon's book on the subject. Had the writer done so, I believe that the editorial would not have been published or would have taken an entirely different direction.

First, you are critical of the commission's failure to blame the Bush administration for 9/11. We also did not blame the Clinton administration for its response to earlier provocations. The commission decided early on that it would write an objective history of the relevant events and decisions that led to 9/11 and leave blame and conclusions to others, both as the correct approach and as the only way to reach the unanimity necessary to the general acceptance of our work by Congress and the country.

The commission's executive director, Philip Zelikow, was not a White House mole; on the contrary, he was often its bane. Of course he called the White House frequently, as did the rest of the senior staff. We needed documents and witnesses and the administration was frequently uncooperative; fairly early on, White House Counsel Alberto Gonzales refused to deal directly with Zelikow. In fact, the White House did not want him appointed and nominated another. We ignored its nominee.

The White House wanted us to find a connection between Iraq and Osama bin Laden's 9/11 plot. While there were contacts between bin Laden and Iraq, Zelikow, the staff and a unanimous commission rejected the asserted connection with 9/11. While I am treated highly favorably in Shenon's book, which does have a number of valuable insights, he simply ignored the protests of staff and members to every one of their critiques of his treatment of Zelikow. He is simply wrong.

As Shenon points out, it was I who nominated Zelikow for the

job, and that choice played a vital role in the success of commission's report and its recommendations' subsequent substantial acceptance by Congress. By reason of his experience, knowledge, dedication and intensity, he was not just a good pick; he was the best we could possibly have made.

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