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Memo:AFTER THE ATTACK

N.Y. LAWMAKER, MIAMI INMATE DISCUSS A WARNING

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A New York congressman met Saturday with an inmate at the Miami-Dade County Jail who claims he warned the FBI in 1997 that Islamic terrorists were planning to fly a plane into the Pentagon. Rep. Gary Ackerman said he spent 90 minutes talking to Thomas Oses, who was arrested Aug. 18 on extortion charges and is awaiting trial.

Oses told Ackerman, D-N.Y., that he learned of the plot while incarcerated at the federal prison in Springfield, Mo., near Sheik Omar Abdel Rahman, who was serving time for masterminding the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Oses said he and Rahman had many conversations. During some of those talks, according to Oses, the blind cleric told him of a broad plan being hatched by Islamic terrorists that included flying an airplane into the Pentagon. "Myself and the sheik spent a lot of time talking about the [1993 World Trade Center] bombing and incredible upcoming future bombings,"

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Oses wrote in a recent affidavit. According to Oses, after he was transferred to a federal prison in Alabama a few months later, he wrote a 13-page letter to the FBI detailing Rahman's threats. The FBI sent two agents to interview him, Oses said. An FBI source familiar with the case told The Herald that Oses did contact the bureau in 1997, but only provided vague information about Rahman's threats. If Oses' account is true, it would add weight to accusations that intelligence lapses failed to prevent the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. However, confirming Oses' claims is proving difficult for Ackerman, Oses' attorney and the media. Ackerman said several other congressman are also interested in interviewing Oses. "His version of the story is contingent upon whether he presented the FBI with a document and what might be in that document," said Ackerman, who was in South Florida on personal business. "We're going to ask the FBI to produce the document."

BOTH INMATES

The U.S. Bureau of Prisons confirmed Oses and Rahman were both inmates in Springfield in summer 1997. Ackerman said he has confirmed with an independent law enforcement source that Oses wrote a letter to the FBI that same year. The FBI source told The Herald that Oses wrote a rambling letter in which he warned that Rahman had threatened to attack a number of sites, including the Pentagon. But Oses didn't mention the use of a plane until agents interviewed him recently at the Miami-Dade jail after the Sept. 11 attacks, the source said. "He's got no credibility," the FBI source said, adding that Oses' letter, which included no specific times or dates, was forwarded at the time to the FBI office in New York. In the meantime, Oses' Miami lawyer, Terence Lenamon, has asked the FBI to make public a copy of the letter. "We need to get that document," Lenamon said Saturday. "The representative and other members of Congress are going to demand the FBI share it with us. And then I think the document will speak for itself."