

September 16, 2021

The Honorable Charles Schumer
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Republican Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Call for Congress to Address Continuity Vulnerabilities

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Minority Leader McCarthy:

Following the 20th anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, we are writing to urge you, as leaders of Congress, to address the urgent and dangerous vulnerabilities to the continuity of all three branches of government.

At the time, 9/11 raised significant concerns about how the legislative branch would be able to respond to the long-term disability or incapacitation of members of Congress. In order to address these concerns, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and the Brookings Institute — leading think tanks on opposite sides of the ideological spectrum — came together to form a [Continuity of Government Commission](#).

Across its extensive, three-volume reviews, the commission demonstrated that none of the three branches, including Congress, have adequate plans in place to ensure continuous and constitutionally valid operation in a time of national crisis. Large-scale events could quickly alter elections or render the House unable to achieve a quorum. In a closely contested Congress — as we currently have in both chambers — a single assassin could alter the makeup and balance of power of the body. As unpleasant as it may be to imagine, these vulnerabilities are invitations to future attacks.

Upon its conclusion in May 2003, the commission issued [a report](#) that included numerous recommendations, including calling for Congress to put in place systems to rapidly replace and temporarily fill vacant seats after a catastrophic attack. But nearly two decades later, the commission's recommendations have gone unaddressed.

Subsequent anthrax attacks, the deaths of several serving and elected members of Congress due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the events of January 6th have only reiterated that threats against members of Congress are real and growing.

Few things could be more important than ensuring that the U.S. government can and will continue to function through natural disasters, domestic threats, and international attacks. Certainly, there are many pressing matters facing Congress, and partisan divides can make it difficult to address challenging issues. Following the 20th anniversary of 9/11, it is time for this issue to transcend partisanship and take precedence.

Congress should take action and build on the work of the Continuity of Government Commission by forming a new body — either a bipartisan, bicameral joint committee or a commission of distinguished former members — that will grapple with modern threats and issue new recommendations designed to ensure continuity of all three branches.

In times of crisis, Americans look to their government and to their leaders. What will happen when their government is unable to respond? The country cannot afford to find out.

Sincerely,

Sen. Gary Hart, D-CO
Rep. Baron Hill, D-IN
Rep. Bart Stupak, D-MI
Rep. Bill Flores, R-TX
Rep. Bill Sarpalius, D-TX
Rep. Bob Carr, D-MI
Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-VA
Rep. Bob Inglis, R-SC
Rep. Brian Baird, D-WA
Rep. Charles Djou, R-HI
Rep. Chris Cox, R-CA
Rep. Connie Morella, R-MD
Rep. Dave Evans, D-IN
Rep. Dan Boren, D-OK
Rep. David Skaggs, D-CO
Rep. Donald Manzullo, R-IL
Rep. Donna Christensen, D-VI
Rep. Eva Clayton, D-NC
Rep. Gary Ackerman, D-NY
Rep. Gene Green, D-TX
Rep. Howard P. “Buck” McKeon, R-CA

Rep. Lawrence Smith, D-FL
Rep. Lewis F. Payne, D-VA
Rep. Matthew F. McHugh, D-NY
Rep. Melissa Hart, R-PA
Rep. Michael Barnes, D-MD
Rep. Michael Capuano, D-MA
Rep. Mike Conaway, R-TX
Rep. Mike Kopetski, D-OR
Rep. Jim Guy Tucker, D-AR
Rep. Jason Altmire, D-PN
Rep. Jim Chapman, D-TX
Rep. Jim Leach, R-LA
Rep. John Faso, R-NY
Rep. John Joseph Cavanaugh, D-NE
Rep. John Tanner, D-TN
Rep. Joseph Hoeffel, D-PA
Rep. Karen Shepherd, D-UT
Rep. Patrick Kennedy, D-RI
Rep. Robin Tallon, D-SC
Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen, R-NJ
Rep. Russ Carnahan, D-MO
Rep. Sam Coppersmith, D-AZ
Rep. Sue Myrick, R-NC
Rep. Tom McMillen, D-MD
Rep. Vic Fazio, D-CA
Rep. William Enyart, D-IL
Rep. Zach Wamp, R-TN

Bipartisan Policy Center

Demand Progress

Issue One

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U.S. Association of Former Members of Congress

Unite America

* Affiliations listed for identification purposes only

cc:

Members of the U.S. House of Representatives
Members of the U.S. Senate