

# **Statement by Newt Gingrich**

March 20, 2002

I fully support ongoing efforts to ensure the continuity of Congress in the face of a terrorist attack. After September 11<sup>th</sup>, we as a nation have had to take extraordinary security precautions. The three branches of government must also make provisions for the unthinkable.

There are two broad areas that must be considered thoroughly but expeditiously. First, vacancies in the House of Representatives are filled only by special election. In ordinary times, this procedure is desirable. But in the case of an emergency it might lead to large numbers of vacancies in the House of Representatives that would last for months. Second, Congress has not adequately considered how to deal with large numbers of members being incapacitated. Both of these issues could seriously impede the functioning of Congress. In the worst case scenario, it might mean that no quorum could be mustered and Congress would be unable to function. Even if a quorum could be found, a Congress with significant numbers of vacancies or incapacitated members is not in the best interest of the nation.

For these reasons I support a constitutional amendment that would grant Congress the power to address these issues. And, as a constitutional amendment might take years to enact, I also support immediate changes in legislation and the Congressional rules that would mitigate these problems in the interim. I very much support the letter urging the leaders of the House and Senate to create a panel to report findings on these matters within three months and to schedule time for floor action on the recommendations.

I am pleased to work with former Speaker Tom Foley on this issue. Preserving the functioning of Congress is not a partisan issue, but an American one. Since September 11<sup>th</sup>, the Congressional leadership has moved quickly to address many security concerns. I urge them to place concerns for the continuity of Congress at the top of their priorities.