

## **THREATS TO CAPITOL DRIVE POST-ATTACK PLANS**

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WASHINGTON — Congress is moving on several fronts to deal with a potential crisis that would have sounded like science fiction before Sept. 11: ensuring that it can act after a terrorist strike.

On Thursday, a bipartisan task force will debate changes to the Constitution that would permit governors to appoint members to the House of Representatives if a large number were killed or incapacitated in an attack. Changes in the order of succession to the presidency also will be examined.

Meanwhile, the House Administration Committee will move forward soon on a proposal to establish an "e-Congress." A six- to 12-month experiment may test how lawmakers scattered across the country could communicate and do business electronically if Washington were destroyed. The committee also will consider alternate sites for Congress to meet.

Motivating lawmakers is a growing realization that despite new restrictions on visitors, vehicles and mail, Capitol Hill is difficult to protect from a possible attack. Many believe that the fourth airplane hijacked in September was headed for the Capitol. Lawmakers have been warned that another such attempt is almost certain.

"No one really likes to think about these things or talk about them, but Sept. 11 took us into a different universe," says Rep. Bob Ney, R-Ohio, chairman of the Administration Committee.

Security has been tightened around the Capitol. Concrete barriers have been installed

to prevent car and truck bombers, and visitors have been restricted. New procedures are in place to inspect and irradiate mail as a result of October's anthrax attack.

To many lawmakers' dismay, however, there remains no central chain of command for Capitol security. The Capitol Police, House and Senate sergeants-at-arms, Washington police and Pentagon all have some responsibility.

Lawmakers' frustration is underscored with fear. Many members have been told in intelligence briefings that the Capitol remains highly vulnerable and that terrorists have targeted it for an undefined future attack. That has added to the urgency of dealing with the "continuity of Congress."

The House is taking the lead because under the Constitution, vacancies in the House can be filled only in special elections. By comparison, governors can fill Senate vacancies by appointment.

"No one wants to contemplate what would happen if there were a mass tragedy and a very substantial number of members of Congress were killed all at one time, but there has to be some sort of plan," Rep. Martin Frost, D-Texas, says. He and Rep. Christopher Cox, R-Calif., will chair today's meeting.

Lawmakers are focusing on:

\*A constitutional amendment to permit the naming of new House members to replace those killed or incapacitated. The constitutionally required special elections usually take about six months. Measures have been introduced to let governors name replacements if 25% or more of House members are unable to serve.

\*Alternate sites for Congress in case Washington is devastated, or if biological or chemical weapons make the Capitol

uninhabitable. The current alternative is Fort McNair, which is about 2 miles southwest of the Capitol.

\*Improved communication devices for House and Senate members. Since Sept. 11, all House members have been given Blackberry communication devices and cards telling them where to go in an emergency.

\*Consideration of an emergency e-Congress. A measure to establish such an electronic capability is gathering support in the House and will likely be given a test run.

\*A review of presidential succession. One possibility is to include governors, who work outside Washington.

California Rep. Jane Harman, the top Democrat on a House intelligence subcommittee, says the continuity of Congress needs to be addressed seriously.

"As long as the Capitol is both the seat and the enduring symbol of our democracy," Harman says, "it will remain a target."