

**BALLOT BOX NEEDS SOME BACKUP  
AGAINST TERRORISM;  
MAKE PLANS TO ENSURE THE  
CONTINUITY OF GOVERNMENT IN THE  
EVENT OF A DISASTROUS ATTACK  
AGAINST THE NATION'S LEADERS.**

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*Los Angeles Times*  
March 29, 2004

The world in recent days saw two direct threats to the sanctity of democratic elections: the horrific terrorist bombing in Spain and the assassination attempt against the Taiwanese president. Both occurred on the eve of national elections. Both show that terrorists and crazed or criminal individuals are focused on undermining the electoral process that underlies democracies.

The United States, of course, is target No. 1. We must recognize a sobering reality: It is imperative that our elections and basic institutions of government continue even if attacks kill our leaders.

Columnist Robert Novak noted last week that intelligence sources had seen a shift in Al Qaeda to a new focus on President Bush and the U.S. presidential election. We cannot count on luck if something bad happens. We need to prepare for worst-case scenarios.

\* Disrupting elections. Polling places are numerous and attractive targets for terrorists. Because elections are decentralized, states and local governments and our new Homeland Security Department must ensure that there is adequate protections for voters and voting machines.

States should update their election codes to provide for holding a new election as

quickly as possible in the event that an election is disrupted by an attack or natural disaster.

All election supervisors should develop backup voter registration lists -- lists that are kept in separate, secure locations.

Funds for these purposes should come from the federal government.

States and political party officials must clarify how they will replace any candidates who are killed or incapacitated shortly before an election.

\* The death of the president-elect and vice president-elect. If terrorists were to kill the president-elect and vice president-elect between election day and inauguration day, our country would face a chaotic situation. If the attack occurred before the electoral college cast its votes in December, the major parties might be called on to submit new nominees who had not stood for popular election. The political parties need to enact rules that specify ways to select replacements.

If the president-elect and vice president-elect were killed after the electoral college had cast its votes, there would be no Cabinet in place to serve as a line of succession. In this case, the presidency would be filled by the speaker of the House, president pro tem of the Senate or a Cabinet member of the outgoing administration, none of whom represented the elected candidate, and who might be of the opposite party.

\* Inauguration day. The single most vulnerable time for our democracy is the inauguration of a president. All the important figures of our government

gather together for a ceremony, and the incoming administration does not yet have anyone in the Cabinet to serve in the line of succession.

Congress should revamp the entire presidential succession process, but in the meantime there is a quicker fix that can be implemented: By the morning of Jan. 20, the outgoing president should nominate a few top members of the Cabinet chosen by the incoming president so that the Senate could confirm them before noon, with one then sent to a secure location during the ceremony.

\* Disrupting Congress and the presidency. On Sept. 11, 2001, terrorists targeted the Capitol with a fourth plane that did not reach its planned destination. If terrorists succeeded in hitting Congress, it might not be able to function for many months.

The Continuity of Government Commission has recommended a constitutional amendment that would provide for immediate temporary replacements chosen by governors or state legislatures (the choice would be up to the states) for dead or incapacitated members of Congress in the event of an attack that hit a large number of them. Otherwise, our nation would spend months under executive rule that might at best be a kind of benign martial law. Similarly, we should reform our presidential succession system so that there are some officials outside of Washington, D.C., who are in the line of succession.

We should also consider removing congressional leaders from the line of succession so that terrorists or zealous

partisans do not think that through an act of violence they can change the party that holds the presidency.

The Spanish elections no doubt buoyed Al Qaeda leaders with the notion they can influence elections.

It will be one victory in the war against terror -- and a deterrent to the terrorists - - if we ensure that our institutions and our constitutional framework will go on no matter what is thrown at us.