

'CRITICAL GAP'

By John McCaslin
The Washington Times
September 16, 2002

More than a year after September 11 and there are still no plans to ensure that Congress could function following a terrorist attack.

So concludes the Continuity of Government Commission, a blue-ribbon panel co-chaired by former Wyoming Sen. Alan K. Simpson and one-time White House Counsel Lloyd N. Cutler.

Despite "extraordinary" measures to protect the seat of government, including plans for a shadow government to ensure Cabinet departments and agencies can function, the vice president spending time at undisclosed locations, gas masks issued on Capitol Hill and emergency evacuation procedures from Washington, "a large and critical gap remains."

"There are no adequate plans to ensure that our three branches of government, and especially Congress, can continue to function after a catastrophic attack has killed or incapacitated a large number of [congressional] members," says the commission.

"Depending on the number of vacancies, the House might not even be able to field a quorum, or it might have to operate with a skeleton crew of members not representative of the country as a whole - even as it makes crucial decisions like a declaration of war, appropriations, intrusions on the civil liberties of citizens or aliens or provision of emergency disaster relief."

The commission, which includes former

House Speakers Thomas Foley and Newt Gingrich, will convene next Monday and again in October, with the goal of issuing a report of recommendations in January. One option, considered during the 1950s, would allow governors to make temporary appointments after a catastrophic event.

Now hear this

Citing an "urgent" need to increase this country's naval force structure, which she says was spread thin prior to September 11, House Armed Services Committee member Rep. Jo Ann Davis has introduced legislation to effectively rebuild the U.S. Navy.

The Virginia Republican's "National Naval Force Structure Policy Act" would require the Navy to have no fewer than 375 vessels in active service, including 15 aircraft carrier battle groups and 15 amphibious ready groups.

The current naval fleet consists of 314 ships.

Politics to prevention

After nearly seven years in the hot seat as press secretary to Republican senator and 2000 presidential candidate John McCain, Nancy Ives is leaving Capitol Hill to become vice president of communications for the Vaccine Fund.

Based in Washington and Lyon, France, the fund's goal is to provide children in developing countries with access to lifesaving vaccines.

"For one of the largest nonprofits in the world, based on assets, we have one of the smallest staffs - \$1.2 billion and a staff of six in the U.S. and six in France," says James M. Jones, executive vice president who spent six years as a top aide to Sen. John Kerry, Massachusetts Democrat.

The fund's chief administrative officer is Joyce Power, who retired from Capitol Hill after 26 years, the last six with Democratic Sen. Kent Conrad of North Dakota; its chief financial officer is Alice Albright, daughter of former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright, most recently with the Carlyle Group; and its fund-raiser is Barbara Kaltenbach, who toiled for Mr. Kerry and South Carolina Democratic Sen. Ernest F. Hollings of South Carolina, among others.

"It's a pretty hard-core Washington group of people," Mr. Jones says.

The Vaccine Fund was created through an initial contribution of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to provide routine immunization in 74 of the world's poorest countries. Its board is chaired by South African statesman Nelson Mandela.

Miss Ives won't be spending her entire time behind a desk in Washington. During her first two weeks on the job she will visit China and Mongolia, two countries where vaccines are desperately needed.

Segregated salute

In a long-overdue tribute, Congress this

week will salute surviving veterans of the Negro Baseball Leagues.

Led by House Republican Conference Chairman Rep. J.C. Watts Jr., Oklahoma Republican, about 100 Negro league veterans, including Willie Mays, will be recognized on Capitol Hill Wednesday.

"The influence of the Negro Baseball Leagues on sports and America is one of the most underrated chapters in our nation's history," says Mr. Watts.

A former star quarterback during college, Mr. Watts says he can "wish for no other goal except for my neighbor to judge me on my performance rather than the color of my skin."

Pork for sheep?

"If Senate Agriculture Appropriations subcommittee member Conrad Burns, Montana Republican, has his way, \$4,285,000 worth of pork will flow back home, including \$675,000 for the Montana Sheep Institute, a very baaaaad idea for taxpayers."

-Sean Rushton, Citizens Against Government Waste

*John McCaslin, a nationally syndicated columnist, can be reached at 202/636-3284 or jmccaslin@washingtontimes.com.