

**PANEL MULLS WAYS OF KEEPING
GOVERNMENT OPERATING AFTER A
MAJOR ATTACK**

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Associated Press

September 23, 2002

WASHINGTON – With the threat of terrorism looming, a commission met Monday to discuss ways to ensure Congress would continue if many of its members were killed or seriously injured.

"We have a big hole in our Constitution about what to do," said former Wyoming Sen. Alan Simpson, co-chairman of the Continuity of Government Commission, a joint project of the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution.

The panel's goal is to offer recommendations to ensure the government will keep operating after a catastrophic attack. Meetings will be held over the next three months; the next is scheduled for Oct. 16. Many lawmakers believe United Airlines Flight 93 was headed for the Capitol before it crashed in a Pennsylvania field Sept. 11. The House and Senate were disrupted later in 2001 when an anthrax-laced letter was opened in the office of Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota.

"Under different circumstances we could end up without a president, Congress and courts for months," said panel member Norman Ornstein of the AEI.

Ornstein pointed out that all nine of the U.S. Supreme Court justices and 13 U.S. Court of Appeals judges were

attending a conference at the Supreme Court the morning of Sept 11.

"If a plane hit, it could have wiped out our judicial system," he said.

Discussion centered on how Congress would regain its numbers if many lawmakers were killed or seriously injured.

New senators could be chosen quickly because governors can appoint successors. House members, however, must be chosen by direct elections that can require up to six months.

"We have nothing for the House," said Ornstein. "There's a real problem with replenishing."

During its first meeting, the commission discussed how any proposal could be made into law. An amendment would have to pass both houses of Congress by two-thirds votes and be ratified by three-fourths of the states.

Rep. Brian Baird, D-Wash., and 86 others have proposed a constitutional amendment to allow governors to appoint representatives for a 90-day term if 25 percent of the House's members have been killed or disabled or are missing and presumed dead. Replacements would not have to be of the same political party as their predecessors.