

**COMMISSION TO ADDRESS  
GOVERNMENT CONTINUITY**

By Emily Macel

*Roll Call*

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WASHINGTON – The Continuity of Government Commission started by the American Enterprise Institute and the Brookings Institution will hold its first meeting today from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

The commission's purpose is to respond to the physical threats to the government posed by terrorism. The hearing-style meeting in Room 1310 of the Longworth House Office Building will allow testimony from expert witnesses, as well as allow a number of Members to address the issues.

The group announced the commission's commencement Thursday. AEI Senior Counselor Norman Ornstein said the commission plans to "focus, look, and come up with a report to present to Congress, the president and the public" that describes an emergency plan for the government, especially Congress, to be able to function if a terrorist attack causes mass vacancies and incapacitated members. Former Presidents Jimmy Carter and Gerald Ford are honorary co-chairmen of the commission. Other members include former Speakers Newt Gingrich (R-Ga.) and Thomas Foley (D-Wash.).

Ornstein, a contributing writer for *Roll Call*, said the recent news that Sept. 11 plotters revealed in an al Jezeera interview that that United Flight 93 was headed for the Capitol underscores the commission's urgency.

Ornstein equated this commission's plan

of amending the Constitution or resolving the situation by other manners as having a member of a family write his will. This "tough love," as he puts it, will protect and preserve Congress.

"It's something that we can't avoid facing," Brookings Senior Counselor Thomas Mann said, adding that the commission realizes there are a great deal of not only general political concerns but also constitutional concerns.

Lloyd Cutler, a co-chairman of the commission, sees the need for an amendment to the Constitution. "There is a true hole in this Constitution and it needs [to be] plugged." Without filling this gap, Cutler says, "every act of the Congress would bear over it a shadow as to its validity."

The commission's concerns are centered on how Congress would function in the case of mass vacancies. The Constitution states that House vacancies are filled by special election, which can be a four-month-long process. "We can't rely on special elections," Ornstein said.

Several of the proposals from commission members give governors the power to make temporary appointments. In Congress, Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), Rep. Brian Baird (D-Wash.) and Rep. Zoe Lofgren (D-Calif.) have made proposals for constitutional amendments on the issue.

On the other hand, some members of Congress hope to avoid an amendment and would prefer a rule or statutory change. "Amendments are very difficult to do ... and we don't expect Congress to act in the next few weeks," said

Ornstein. The lengthy seven-year process for the passing of an amendment would need to be sped up, Cutler said.

Foley agreed that the commission's plan is necessary: "The system should not be exposed to the extreme effects of another terrorist attack."

The commission will meet again Oct. 16 and issue a report in January.