

**CONGRESSMAN JIM LANGEVIN**  
**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE**  
**HEARING ON**  
**“E-CONGRESS? USING TECHNOLOGY TO CONDUCT CONGRESSIONAL**  
**OPERATIONS IN EMERGENCY SITUATIONS”**  
**MAY 1, 2002**

I would like to thank Chairman Ney and Ranking Member Hoyer for holding this hearing today on E-Congress.

It is no secret that I have been promoting this idea for months now. My bill, the Ensuring Congressional Security and Continuity Act (HR 3481), is just a first step. Today’s hearing takes the next step by examining the numerous issues involved in planning for the unthinkable.

Mr. Chairman, you have been extremely supportive of my interest in pursuing a means to ensure that Congress can continue to communicate and function regardless of future attacks in whatever form – be it weapons-based, anthrax or even a cyber attack – or a natural disaster like the tornado that severely immobilized many of our Maryland neighbors. I appreciate your leadership in this endeavor, but I fear that many of our colleagues do not understand just how necessary it is.

Just this week, CIA Deputy Director for Operations James Pavitt said, “Despite the best efforts of so much of the world, [as far as] the next terrorist attack – it’s not a question of if, it’s a question of when.”

September 11<sup>th</sup> and the subsequent anthrax attack on our congressional offices exposed just how vulnerable we are, particularly because we are centrally located. In fact, had the Pennsylvania flight taken off on time and headed straight for the Capitol, we would have been casting our journal vote at the very same time.

I am not alone in my concerns for the unthinkable. Four years ago Speaker Gingrich and President Clinton made a historic commitment:

- To analyze our current terrorism threat both here and abroad,
- To develop concrete recommendations to stem the tide of American hatred that had swept over specific regions of the world, and
- To ensure this country remained not only safe, but that our freedom and democracy would be unshackled by fear or danger.

The Hart-Rudman Report was the result of this visionary pledge. This Report concluded that “America will become increasingly vulnerable to hostile attack on our homeland, and our military superiority will not entirely protect us.... States, terrorists, and other disaffected groups will acquire weapons of mass destruction and mass disruption, and some will use them. Americans will likely die on American soil.”

We cannot ignore what so many leaders and experts in international terrorism have been telling us over the past several years. The time is ripe for Congress to take responsible, appropriate steps to ensure that we can continue to function smoothly if the Capitol Hill buildings are destroyed or Members of Congress cannot deliberate in Washington, DC.

E-Congress is a powerful option, but it is not the only option. I know that some Members would not want to vote electronically or may not be familiar with the Internet. However, today's hearing and my mantra over the past several months is about much more than this one aspect of congressional continuity. What I would like to see is:

- First, a concrete plan of action developed, approved and understood by all Members of Congress by the end of this year.
- Second, a plan that includes an Internet-based and satellite-based communications system where a Member can log on with secure, biometrics technology from anywhere in the world to acknowledge that he is alive and not incapacitated and give his physical location. This system also allows the Member to get directions from the House leadership on the number of Members who have been killed or incapacitated, what immediate governmental activities must occur in response to the attack or disaster, and a timeline for when, where and how Congress will reconvene.
- Third, the plan could also include alternative meeting locations, a means of deliberating, a format for following parliamentary procedure, a way for the public to follow congressional activities and ensure Congress upholds the democratic process, along with many other details for effective, constitutional continuity in congressional operations.

The most important thing is for this plan to establish a two-way backup communications system that is both reliable and secure. Moreover, this plan would only be executed in an emergency. The traditional personal, face-to-face interactions that we all enjoy would not be jeopardized. The E-Congress idea is simply a means to facilitate an organized system for congressional continuity if, and only if, an attack or disaster strikes again.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Mr. Hoyer for starting this much-needed dialogue on an issue few want to discuss. I understand this reluctance. Who wants to face such grim prospects? But we must. It is our duty as Members of Congress to lead this country, to prepare the legislative branch for any kind of disaster, and to ensure freedom and democracy always prevail.