

**Committee on House Administration
Subcommittee on Modernization Hearing
“Continuity of Congress: Preparing for the Future by Learning from the Past”
September 18, 2024, at 12:00 pm
Committee on House Administration Ranking Member Joe Morelle (NY-25)
Opening Statement as Prepared**

Thank you, Madame Chair.

First, I want to thank my colleague and friend our Subcommittee Ranking Member Derek Kilmer for his work and leadership on the topic of the continuity of Congress.

I also want to thank our Subcommittee Chair Stephanie Bice and all of the Members joining us here today for their willingness to discuss this topic in a bipartisan manner.

We know imagining disaster scenarios targeting our colleagues and ourselves is hard—bombs at the State of the Union or our parties conventions—assassins targeting just enough Members of the majority party to make them the minority party.

And yet, as the Ranking Member of the Committee in this body tasked with ensuring the House operates, I know we need to be prepared to ensure this Congress—our democracy—can function in the face of disasters we prefer not to think about at all.

Right now, vacancies in Congress are filled through special elections.

This led several bipartisan Members of this committee to write a letter to the Government Accountability Office (GAO), requesting they examine how quickly states will be able to hold special elections following a mass casualty event.

The full House Administration Committee also voted unanimously for an amendment earlier this Congress directing this same study. I am proud of this bipartisan step to become better informed about the topic at hand.

The previous Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress made a related recommendation, to establish a Joint Committee of Members to ensure congressional continuity in the face of the next, potentially unforeseen crisis, modeled after prior legislation that was never enacted. The Modernization Subcommittee convening today is tasked with driving home implementation of open recommendations.

I also know Ranking Member Kilmer thinks this issue has been studied enough and that it is now time for action. So, I look forward to a discussion of his bipartisan constitutional amendment, H.J.Res. 118, as well.

Ensuring we get continuity right matters for several reasons.

First, we need to maintain uninterrupted legislative capacity during times of crisis—especially if Congress needs to pass funding bills, war authorizations, or other emergency legislation to respond.

Our Constitution established the balance of power between the three branches of government. If one third of our branches is compromised so is the balance envisioned by our founders.

Finally, all American citizens deserve representation in Congress—even in emergency situations.

This is a tough topic.

There are no easy solutions.

But that does not mean this group of colleagues cannot make important strides today to ensure the United States House of Representatives is better prepared when disaster strikes than we were before we convened here.

I look forward to today's hearing, and I yield back.

###