

**Testimony of Lorelei Kelly**  
**Director of Congressional Modernization,**  
**Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown**  
**Before the House Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress,**  
**On Continuity of Congress**  
**March 25, 2021**

Good morning and thank you for inviting me to testify. My name is Lorelei Kelly, I lead congressional modernization research at the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown and I worked for a decade on national security issues here in Congress.

In October, 2019, I co authored a memo to this committee on congressional continuity in case of disruption, including a pandemic or catastrophic event. I will submit this memo and other continuity planning documents along with a promise to follow up with details or expert connections if so desired.

Benjamin Franklin once said “If you fail to plan, you’re planning to fail”

Safeguarding American democracy through prevention and planning is a vital challenge and should be based on a thorough analysis of probable threats and the risks associated with them.

The first step in continuity planning should be a list of assets that you can draw on as you grid essential functions and threats for specific scenarios. Congress has recent experience and insights having carried on through a pandemic and an insurrection. We are practicing continuity right now at this listening session. Let’s start continuity planning by making sure the last 12 months are documented and shared for common reference moving forward.

Other threats we must consider include natural disasters, Chem Bio, Cyber and Kinetic attack. Each threat scenario has specific preparatory requirements like a secure HVAC system, or an alternative location to convene. As we've learned from January 6th, mental health resources are vital. These sorts of needs will fill in your continuity planning grid.

I suggest that you look for help and guidance from the people with deep operational experience in continuity planning: the military and Wall Street, for example.

The military plans constantly for continuity because they operate in circumstances where they must assume physical decapitation, that their people are gone or that the infrastructure is going down—or both.

Private industry models are helpful for Congress' continuity planning. Like Congress, banks have enterprise communications architecture and create constant transactional data. A critical factor for the continuity of twin tower businesses after 9/11 was redundant data storage. Indeed, a robust continuity plan must include not just physical security, but institutional memory. Some businesses that lost all their records on site during the attacks had only data located on employee's personal computers. More than half of all small to medium-sized enterprises affected by 9/11 did not trade again.

Resilient systems protect themselves so that they can move seamlessly through disruption. The institutional memory of Congress is mission critical data. This includes current data...but also the historic data used in lawmaking. It must be backed up off site and regularly updated. The House has ideas for modern technology and data, largely informed by this committee's work. Continuity of Congress requirements should be integrated into this thinking.

Creating a continuity plan for Congress is a matter of sitting down and pulling guidance resources together that can then be adapted for this unique institution. Today I am

submitting articles and documents with helpful and basic planning insights for Members of Congress. This include a workshop curriculum from FEMA, the 2017 DHS Continuity Directive and the National Risk Management Center overview,

Your next step is to rally interest among your colleagues. The expertise and willingness to help with this critical planning exists nearby or is just a Zoom away. Let's get started as soon as possible so we are not ambushed by a failure of imagination.

## **Lorelei Kelly Testimony Talking Points:**

- Continuity planning is a fundamental duty in safeguarding democracy
- We are practicing continuity now, by carrying on with congressional deliberations amidst a pandemic and post-insurrection
- Continuity planning for Congress will require building a grid of potential threats with corresponding preparation requirements unique to Congress
- The military and Wall Street can provide insights and helpful operational models for continuity planning
- Institutional memory is mission critical data for Congress. Redundant data storage must be part of continuity planning and integrated with modernization

## **Bio:**

Lorelei Kelly founded the Resilient Democracy Coalition and is based at the Beeck Center for Social Impact + Innovation at Georgetown University where she leads research on modernizing Congress. Her work explores how data, technology and new participation methods can strengthen the legislative branch. Lorelei attended Grinnell College, Stanford University, and the Air Command and Staff College of the US Air Force.

**Lorelei Kelly Supplemental Attachments for Quick Reference:**

[Memo to the Modernization Committee on Legislative Branch Continuity](#) 10/2019

<https://www.legbranch.org/app/uploads/2019/11/Kelly-and-Harris-Remote-Congress-Disaster-Continuity.pdf>

[Resilience Defined for Congress:](#) Insights from Hill Staff interviews. Legislative Data and Transparency Conference remarks, 6/2016

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1J9NrYCkhv07EzS8Mc8kSNLI6JI60MaFzRJcVXEjVBfQ/edit>

[Disaster planning and Business Continuity after 9/11](#) by John Paul Kamath, Computer Weekly 9/11/2007

<https://www.computerweekly.com/news/2240082860/Disaster-planning-and-business-continuity-after-9-11>

[Business Continuity Management, Lessons from the Pandemic](#) by Philip Samson, Forbes, 3/15/2021

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2021/03/15/business-continuity-management-lessons-from-the-pandemic/?sh=5529d56e5228>

**Please see SCOMC staff for a copy of the following:**

- FEMA Mission Essential workshop curriculum for continuity coordinators,
- 2017 DHS Federal Continuity Directive
- National Risk Management Center overview
- A Business Continuity Solution Selection Methodology by Ellis Holman, IBM , 2012 see pg. 10 for Disaster Recovery Tiers

