

insights

TYPES NOT MAPPED YET November 15, 2023 | TTR not mapped yet | Christopher T. Murray

Presidential Succession

The order in which government leaders are tasked with performing the duties of the president if the incumbent cannot carry out the office's responsibilities.

Veep

Article II of the Constitution [establishes](#) the presidential succession sequence. The vice president is to serve when the president is unable to discharge their duties. Further, Article II directs Congress to establish officers to fill the role should the vice president also be unable to serve. Congress passed the first [Presidential Succession Act](#) in 1792, adding the president pro tempore of the Senate and speaker of the House to the line of succession.

The [ratification](#) of the Twenty-Fifth Amendment in 1967 sets further parameters and remedies for presidential disability and succession. Today, the [order](#) of succession begins with the vice president, the speaker of the House, and the president pro tempore of the Senate before the cabinet secretaries, which remain in order of agency establishment.

Madam Secretary

Historical events also have led to an adjustment in succession policy, including the establishment of the designated survivor procedure in the 1950s during the Cold War. The designated survivor is an individual in the presidential line of succession chosen to remain in a secure facility during events such as the State of the Union and presidential inaugurations in the event of mass casualties. Designated survivors must be eligible to serve as president, meaning they must meet age and citizenship requirements. The secrecy and significance of this role [heightened](#) after the September 11 terrorist attacks when then-Secretary of Commerce Donald Evans was sequestered in a secure facility for several days.

In the wake of September 11, the House [amended](#) its rules to include a new provision for continuity in the event of a catastrophe. Since 2003, the speaker provides the clerk "a list of Members in the order in which each shall act as Speaker pro tempore" in the case of a vacancy. Individuals included on this list are a closely held secret to protect their safety and ensure continuing governmental operations.

House of Cards

With the 118th Congress having two speakers so far, the line of presidential succession entered uncharted waters over the past few weeks. For nearly a month, the office of the second-in-line for the presidency was vacant. Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), in Congress for just seven years and unknown to most Americans, now sits two heartbeats from the presidency.

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