

**Opening Statement of Ranking Member Tom Carper**  
**“Continuity of Senate Operations and Remote Voting in Times of Crisis”**  
**April 30, 2020**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for your leadership on this issue. This is an extremely important topic, and I’m pleased that we are able to have this discussion even as we continue to work remotely.

My service on this committee started less than a year before the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. As our colleagues and many members of our staffs will recall, one of the planes hijacked that morning was likely heading for the U.S. Capitol. So in the wake of that tragic day in our country’s history, we started a conversation about issues like how to assemble Congress in a secure, remote location in the event that we couldn’t meet in Washington, DC. There were also tough conversations about how to reconstitute Congress in the event of significant vacancies in the House and the Senate. It was a scary and challenging time.

The new challenges that we face today as a result of COVID-19 are no less scary and no less challenging.

As COVID-19 deaths throughout our country continue to grow, it’s essential that those of us serving in Congress are able to respond quickly and effectively to events. Our top priority right now should be to do all we can to provide the necessary support to first responders, health professionals, businesses, and state and local governments, many of whom are stressed almost to the breaking point by the toll this disease has taken. With that thought in mind, I believe this is a good time to restart those sobering discussions from almost 20 years ago and begin to figure out how we can make sure this Congress and future Congresses able to function during a major crisis that might make it difficult for all of us to assemble in Washington, DC.

Whenever I’m confronted with a difficult policy decision like this one, I’m reminded of three adages. The first one is, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” So as we’ve looked at the rules governing emergency operations in the Senate, I’ve asked myself “Are they broken?”

I suppose one could point to the fact that we’ve been able – with strong bipartisan support – to enact trillions of dollars in spending to fund badly needed programs in recent weeks and argue that things are working just fine. At the same time, though, much more needs to be done, and divisions are starting to show as we debate from afar and in the media about what to do next and when. It may be that unanimous consent is no longer an option; however, inaction is not an option either. So if a remote voting system for the Senate allows us to move to the next stage in our response to COVID-19, we need to consider it.

But as we consider some of the changes that have been proposed to Senate procedures recently, I’m reminded of second adage: “Do no harm.” We should not allow any remote voting system established to deal with the impact of COVID-19 to be abused to further unrelated, partisan

goals. It would be truly unfortunate if a system we set up to allow us to deal with this disease were also used in the coming months – for example – to confirm controversial nominees.

Potentially even worse than that, however, would be future Senate Majority Leaders using remote voting ever more frequently in future years to conduct routine Senate business so that members can remain home in their home states rather than returning to Washington to do our Nation's business.

Just about every significant legislative success that I've been a part of as a member of this body has come out of personal relationships that I've been fortunate to develop with my colleagues during our time in Washington, and through face-to-face discussions and negotiations in the Capitol and in our offices. Losing those relationships and the ability to work closely with our colleagues could well mean losing forever the Senate as we have known it in the past, and likely accelerate all of the negativity and partisanship that has made Congress so unpopular with voters in recent years.

So let me close, Mr. Chairman, by acknowledging that there are more than a few tough questions that we'll need to confront as we try to decide what course to follow with respect to this issue. Helping us on that journey is my third – and final – adage of the morning: "Find out what works and do more of that." After all, our country is not alone in grappling with this global outbreak. We would be wise to look closely at how other countries and legislative bodies are dealing with these same issues – including a number of states that are taking bold steps – and see what lessons we can learn from their experiences.

I want to again thank you, Mr. Chairman, as well as the members of our respective staffs, for the work that went into pulling this discussion together. And to our witnesses, let me welcome each of you. We look forward to hearing from you and to a productive and timely conversation on a topic that needs to be addressed at this critical time in our nation's history.