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Presidential Succession: Communication from the President of the United States: Recommending Revision of the Laws as Suggested in His Message to Congress of June 19, 1945

Harry S. Truman

United States. President (1945-1953: Truman)

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PRESIDENTIAL SUCCESSION

COMMUNICATION

FROM

THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

RECOMMENDING

REVISION OF THE LAWS AS SUGGESTED IN HIS MESSAGE TO
CONGRESS OF JUNE 19, 1945

FEBRUARY 5, 1947.—Referred to the Committee on the Judiciary and ordered to
be printed

THE WHITE HOUSE,
Washington, February 5, 1947.

HON. JOSEPH W. MARTIN, JR.,
Speaker of the House of Representatives,
Washington, D. C.

MY DEAR MR. SPEAKER: On June 19, 1945, I sent a message to the Congress of the United States suggesting that the Congress should give its consideration to the question of the Presidential succession.

In that message it was pointed out that under the existing statute governing the succession to the office of President, members of the Cabinet successively fill the office in the event of the death of the elected President and Vice President. It was further pointed out that, in effect, the present law gives to me the power to nominate my immediate successor in the event of my own death or inability to act.

I said then, and I repeat now, that in a democracy, this power should not rest with the Chief Executive. I believe that, insofar as possible, the office of the President should be filled by an elective officer.

In the message of June 19, 1945, I recommended that the Congress enact legislation placing the Speaker of the House of Representatives first in order of succession and, if there were no Speaker or if he failed to qualify, that the President pro tempore of the Senate should act until a duly qualified Speaker was elected.

A bill (H. R. 3587) providing for this succession was introduced in the House of Representatives and was passed by the House on June 29, 1945. It failed, however, to pass the Senate.

The same need, for a revision of the law of succession, that existed when I sent the message to the Congress on June 19, 1945, still exists today.

I see no reason to change or amend the suggestion which I previously made to the Congress, but if the Congress is not disposed to pass the type of bill previously passed by the House, then I recommend that some other plan of succession be devised so that the office of the President would be filled by an officer who holds his position as a result of the expression of the will of the voters of this country.

It is my belief that the present line of succession, as provided by the existing statute, which was enacted in 1886, is not in accord with our basic concept of government by elected representatives of the people.

I again urge the Congress to give its attention to this subject.

Very sincerely yours,

HARRY S. TRUMAN.

