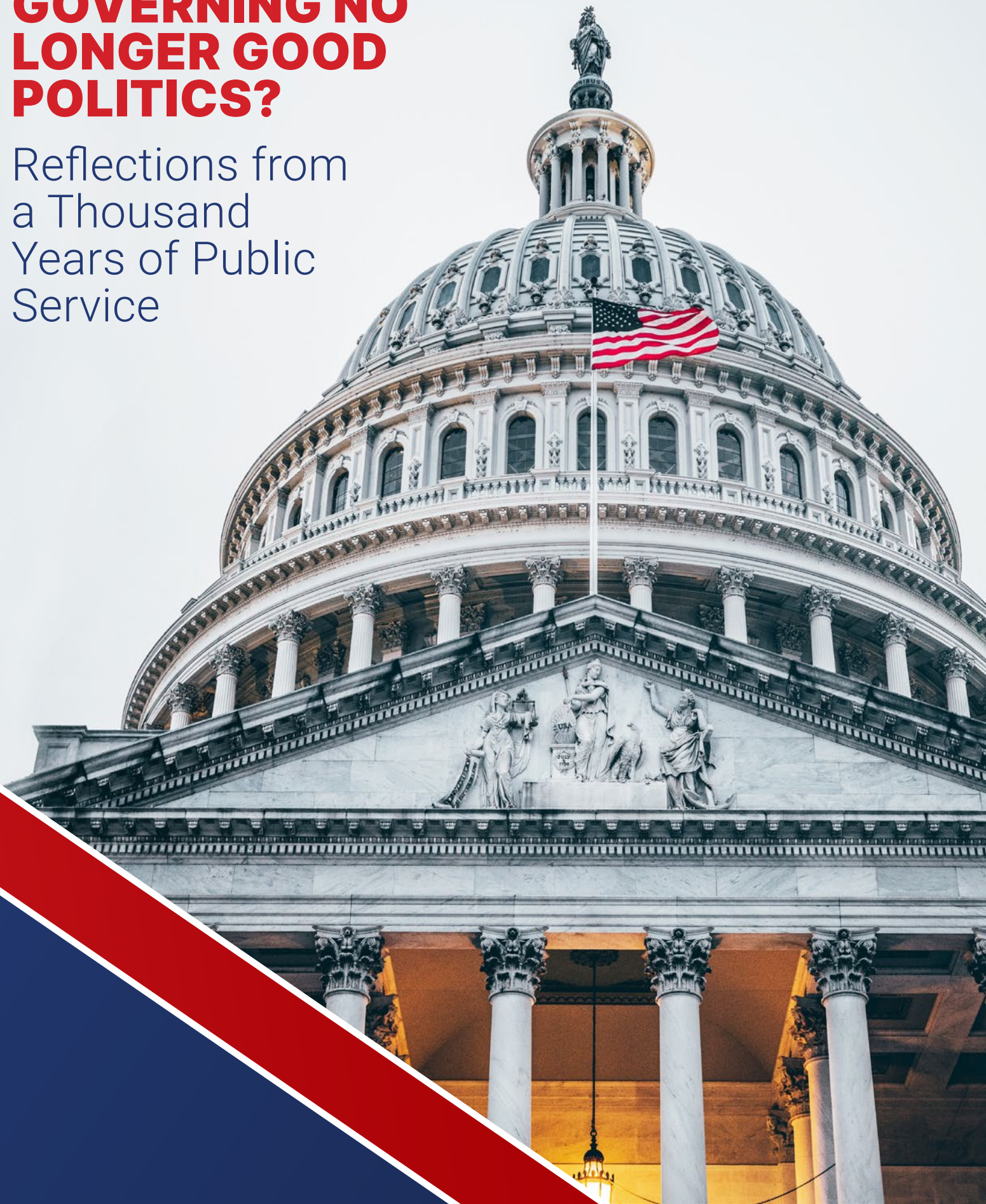


WHY IS GOVERNING NO LONGER GOOD POLITICS?

Reflections from
a Thousand
Years of Public
Service



INTRODUCTION:

WHY IS GOVERNING NO LONGER GOOD POLITICS?



In the midst of a bitterly divisive presidential election, a global pandemic, and an economic devastation, former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta posed a simple question with no clear answer: *“Why is governing no longer good politics?”*

This straightforward question encapsulates why so many Americans feel politically homeless and frustrated with their government. After years of campaigns and elections, and billions of dollars spent trying to convince voters of the right path forward for the country, why does nothing seem to change? Moreover, why does partisanship continue to harm our political process, and what, if anything, can be done to stop this dysfunction?

To help answer these questions and provide context for how our country arrived at this moment, we turned to a unique constituency—former elected and appointed government officials.

The perspectives in this report represent nearly 1,000 years of public service, spanning every presidential administration from John F. Kennedy to Donald J. Trump, and are evenly divided between Republican and Democratic contributors. Respondents include former mayors, governors, members of Congress, U.S. ambassadors, cabinet secretaries, and White House chiefs of staff.

Importantly, we asked and received answers to our guiding question—*why is governing no longer good politics, and what can be done to change this dynamic*—prior to Election Day 2020. The issues that have led us to this moment transcend any particular party, candidate, or electoral outcome. And because few moments offer such an opportunity for change as the start of a new presidency and a new Congress, it is our hope that sharing these reflections now will help serve as the launching point for a broader conversation on these important issues.

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In my over 50 years of public life, I have seen Washington at its best and Washington at its worst. The good news is that I have seen Washington work—Republicans and Democrats working together to achieve landmark legislation for the country.

In 1966, after my service in the Army, I went to Washington to become a legislative assistant to Senator Thomas Kuchel—a moderate Republican who was serving as minority whip under the Republican leader Everett Dirksen of Illinois. Dirksen and a number of moderate Republican Senators worked with President Johnson and a number of their Democratic colleagues on landmark legislation—from civil rights to education to Medicare to infrastructure, etc. Their success was based on mutual trust and respect, a consensus that legislative action was needed, a willingness to compromise, and a belief that achievement would be rewarded by the voters whose lives were improved.

The same was true when I was elected to Congress in 1976. Speaker Tip O’Neill—a Democrat’s Democrat—had a close relationship with Bob Michel, the Republican leader from Illinois. Of course, they had political differences, but on big issues, they worked together. In the Reagan Administration, they passed Social Security reform, tax reform, budgets, immigration reform, etc. I was able to get things done for my constituents and was rewarded by their votes. Governing was good politics.

Why has that changed? The measure is no longer what you have achieved for your district and country, but whether you have been loyal to your party and its base of support. Safe Republican and Democratic seats have given the extremes of both parties greater power. Fundraising used to occur at the district and state levels but is now focused largely on PAC money controlled by the parties. Furthermore, media and social media stress conflict more than compromise.

Leadership used to provide cover for tough votes, but now avoids offending the party base. The voting public, which is increasingly polarized, cares more about fighting over the problem than resolving the problem. Members who want to govern in the midst of this partisan trench warfare fear getting shot in the back if they attempt to find compromise. This failure to govern will not change from the top. It will only change when newer members are elected who form a bloc of votes that cares more about taking the risk to govern than appeasing their political parties. The dysfunction in Washington has gone on for too long and will not be easy to change. But change can happen if both parties discover again that governing can be good politics.

LEON PANETTA

*House of Representatives
(1977-93), Office of
Management and Budget
Director (1993-94), White
House Chief of Staff
(1994-97), CIA Director
(2009-11), United States
Secretary of Defense
(2011-13)*

FINDINGS FROM FORMERS

Given the former officials' candor and honesty, we wanted to share the views of respondents in their own words, with excerpts organized by thematic findings. We encourage you to read the responses in their entirety by visiting fixusnow.org/governingreport.

The responses confirmed both our worst fears about the dysfunction of our political system and our best hopes that change is possible. What emerged were four key findings that aligned with two overarching themes. First is that the political system has built-in incentives—including our electoral systems and polarized media environment—that make good governing bad politics. And second is that regardless of those incentives, it is the obligation of all of us—as individual citizens and governmental leaders—to engage and take responsibility for turning the tide.

It seems time for us to again do the right thing. Leadership will be important to change course. But, so too will be a change of heart among all Americans for a willingness to build bridges instead of walls, to embrace again *E Pluribus Unum*, and to follow the better angels of our nature.

Bob Beauprez
House of Representatives (2003-07)



ABOUT FIXUS

FixUS is a project of the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget committed to engaging fellow citizens to better understand and address our nation's growing divisions, dysfunction, and distrust in our political system. Through a number of research projects, public engagement efforts, and partnerships, we seek to bring attention and visibility to these issues, build support for necessary changes, and ultimately help to regain a sense of shared aspirations, values, and a belief that there is more that unites us than divides us.

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Good governance starts and ends with those who step forward to lead and serve. This includes nearly 24 million Americans, a little over 15 percent of the workforce, who Brookings estimates are involved in government service today. That's despite record low public trust: Pew found only 20 percent of Americans trust the federal government to simply "do the right thing."

Our confidence in and support for government has everything to do with the respect we have for those who serve. When we hear phrases like "drain the swamp," or we see family members and cronyism dominate, or we see scientists and other experts undermined, that confidence and support erode. Not so long ago, public service—whether in elected office, law enforcement, teaching, or at a public institution or agency—was seen as a high calling, a way to serve others in a rewarding career. Today, the public sector workforce is aging, government technology has become outdated, and many of our best and brightest want nothing to do with the scrutiny and ridicule (or worse) that comes with public service.

But there is hope, and it lies in the optimistic, innovative, and courageous American people who have witnessed the best and worst examples of leadership in their recent lifetimes. We can help ensure good governing happens by supporting those willing to serve by expecting high standards, investing in government infrastructure, and honoring good service.

**MARGARET
SPELLINGS**

*United States Secretary
of Education (2005-09)*

STRUCTURAL INCENTIVES:

ELECTORAL SYSTEMS & MONEY IN POLITICS

Governing starts at the ballot box. We the people choose those who serve in office, with the understanding they will do their best to make and execute the policies and laws that reflect our interests. Yet government officials also respond to incentives, and our electoral systems and processes increasingly give disproportionate power to the extreme flanks of each party, resulting in a political system that has become a zero-sum game. Gerrymandered congressional districts, partisan primaries, and money in politics were consistently cited as core contributors to our current environment, and were offered as necessary areas for reform if we are to improve governance in the future.

Jason Altmire

(House of Representatives 2007-13)

Politicians behave in ways that appeal to the voters who control their fate at the ballot box. Increasingly more often, those voters represent the fringe of our two parties. Election results are thus driven by the most ideologically extreme voters our nation has to offer...Moving to top-two open primaries or ranked-choice ballots will make a world of difference by giving moderate voters a voice in the process, thereby diluting the influence of the fringe voters who now determine our elected leaders. Only then will candidates be incentivized towards moderation.

Bill Brock

(House of Representatives 1963-71, US Senate 1971-77, United States Trade Representative 1981-85, United States Secretary of Labor 1985-87)

Some call it “gerrymandering” but basically it is often simply a rigging of the rules as states carve up districts on a purely partisan basis. Everything is then decided in primaries...Money too has become the “opioid” of politics, corrupting the entire process of governance. Far too many elected officials spend more days fundraising than legislating. It has to change. Limit the amount of money, limit the time it can be given, disclose all contributions, every one, and expose “Dark Money” groups.

Lynn Schenk

(House of Representatives 1993-95)

Gerrymandering has created very blue or very red districts wherein the popular red or blue candidate in those districts get elected. However, those are

not necessarily the candidates who can best govern. The best public officials attempt to understand other points of view. Gerrymandering is a recipe for poor governance. It may be “good” politics, but does not create good governance.

Albert Wynn

(House of Representatives 1993-2008)

Unfortunately, modern politics is driven by gerrymandered districts, controversy-seeking media, and frenzied social media pundits [who] treat politics as a zero-sum game. I win, you lose. To compromise is to sell out. Thus, many politicians (and their voters) are satisfied simply with the rightness of their position and rhetoric, rather than having an urgency to legislate. Redistricting reform would certainly help. Greater activism by bipartisan groups like the Problem Solvers Caucus and Third Way could also begin to change the discussion.

Steve Israel

(House of Representatives 2001-17)

Partisan gerrymandering, opinionated cable news, and social media disrupted the dynamic. Many of my colleagues worried more about a primary from within their own party than a challenge in the general election. As partisan intensity increased among voters, bipartisan cooperation became vilified more than valued. Soon, shutting down the government was more important than good government. The extremes are pulling our two-party system further apart—and the victim is good government.

Glenn Nye

(House of Representatives 2009-11)

We have allowed political parties to craft an election system that benefits their own short-term advantages over the health of our democracy, and with their scorched-earth efforts to win majorities at all costs, the costs to our society are high...With election reforms that incentivize basic cooperation, like open primaries, instant run-offs, and an end to gerrymandering, we can have a system where good governing results in re-election. That will help break our current doom cycle.

Allyson Schwartz

(House of Representatives 2005-15)

The gerrymandering process has made red districts redder and blue districts bluer. Such highly divided districts make bipartisanship less likely...The answer is simple: independent, nonpartisan commissions to design fair legislative districts at the state and federal levels.

Bill Clinger

(House of Representatives 1979-97)

There are 435 congressional districts in America. Only 33 of them are considered competitive and the majority party in each state stacks the deck in favor of its party...Mainstream Republicans or Democrats are less likely to vote in primaries but zealous ones on both sides always vote which often results in the election of a candidate more to the right or to the left of their party and less willing to compromise. Result: gridlock and an unproductive congress.

Pat Schroeder

(House of Representatives 1973-97)

Does good governing make good politics? No, sadly money has seriously upended the process...Spoiler alert: few if any big donors give money for "good government," but instead have special requests or favors for their donations! Bottom line, one is much more apt to have a successful career if they can raise a lot of money than if they are invested in making government work.

I honestly believe today's government paralysis can be traced back to the emergence of gerrymandering and one-party Congressional districts. During my time in Congress, I represented a competitive district. To succeed, I needed to work with members of both parties; and to find compromise that would result in bipartisan enactment of our agreements. For us, it was all about governing. Today, it is all about power and control. When the goal is so dramatically different, everything changes.

Steve Gunderson

House of Representatives (1981-97)

Carlos Curbelo

(House of Representatives 2015-19)

All of the odds are stacked against legislators who are seeking to build coalitions and work with colleagues to forge compromises. The rules, especially in the House, concentrate too much power at the leadership level. Chamber leaders consistently exploit the rules to block member initiatives...It is no coincidence that many legislative questions today are resolved by the executive and judicial branches. This is because legislators are not empowered to make laws.

Jonathan Rothschild

(Mayor of Tucson, AZ 2011-19)

Why does it seem good governing is no longer good politics? Gerrymandering, fundraising, and the siloing of the political parties...Is the solution more political parties; non-partisan elections; require electeds to spend personal time with each other? Another issue. Once elected, fundraising and pleasing a base become a reality, and the temptation to be re-elected becomes a primary driver.

Erik Paulsen

(House of Representatives 2009-19)

On the fundraising side, somehow there should be changes so members only fundraise for their own campaigns and not be able to raise funds or contribute to the NRCC [National Republican Congressional Committee] or DCCC [Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee]. These organizations require huge amounts of “dues” from their members which occupies too much time and reinforces the “us” vs “them” mentality at every level.

Tim Roemer

*(House of Representatives 1991-2003,
United States Ambassador to India 2009-11)*

We need to envision an office in the White House dedicated to strengthening democratic institutions and restoring the ideals of civic education in our schools. We need the private sector, led by businesses and corporations, to propose a new set of principles or standards for political contributions to candidates, including ethics and support for democracy.

We should create a national commission comprised of leading citizens to propose ideas to secure and

protect our electoral system, prevent outside foreign interference, revive civic pride and education, propose new training for non-partisan and expert poll workers and judges, and initiate a patriotic national service program...And we must fix our campaign system so that “big money” does not buy a seat for office, dominate political influence, and degrade the American Dream. Alexis de Tocqueville would drown today in the Washington swamp.

Mack McLarty

(White House Chief of Staff 1993-94)

Good governance—that is, governance that reflects the will of the people—would be good politics...But over the past few decades, a playbook has emerged for short-circuiting this essential principle by avoiding the need for compromise. It includes such actions as gerrymandering districts, undermining voting rights protections, demonizing the impartial press, encouraging the growth of biased partisan media, and resisting calls for campaign finance reform...For our democracy to be revitalized, it must be reformed by norm, by law, and by leaders willing to put the common good ahead of partisan gain.

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A divided Congress in the 1980s still found a way to conduct the nation's business. A Democratic House, a Republican Senate, and a Republican President enacted Social Security reform, a major highway/infrastructure bill, tax reform and simplification (without adding to the deficit), superfund/environmental legislation, immigration reform and more.

Today, with Congress and the White House similarly divided, gridlock and acrimony have replaced compromise and accomplishment.

What has gone wrong? There is no single, simple answer to that question.

Gerrymandered districts have created too many safe seats—driving politics to the furthest extremes where winning the primary election is tantamount to victory in November. Outside campaign money—aided and abetted by the Citizens United decision of the Supreme Court—has injected poison into our political discourse. Most candidates see their own campaign expenditures dwarfed by these so-called independent groups. Social media has led too many Americans to garner their information from biased, typically inflammatory, sources.

Gerrymandering produces a Congress with too few moderates and too many ideologues—making common ground harder to find. Outside money—mostly used to finance negative attack ads—makes it more difficult for winning candidates to take a “forgive and forget” attitude once in office. Social media allows interest groups to quickly stir up a firestorm whenever legislators have the audacity to think for themselves. These enervating factors are making it impossible to get the nation's work done.

As voters, we need to change our approach to voting—if we want to see change in Congress.

Most of us belong to some sort of special interest group—a union, the NRA, the Sierra Club, the AARP. We need to understand that these organizations—even if well intended—are feeding us one-sided information. We need to be more skeptical and questioning of their propaganda.

Most of us prefer certain news outlets and avoid others based on our own political leanings. Yet, sadly today, virtually all news organizations allow bias to enter into their reporting. We need to diversify our news sources and seek to challenge our own opinions, not solely to reinforce our opinions.

Most of us want Congress to address the most pressing issues of the day. But that cannot happen unless we elect leaders who demonstrate genuine ability to work across the aisle. Candidates often claim they will work with the other side. But look for evidence that they have actually done so. A simple test: If they have a 100 percent voting record with liberal or conservative interest groups, they are NOT likely to be legislators who are seeking common ground. Finally, stay off of social media. It amplifies our differences and intensifies our divide.

A better Congress requires each of us to be better citizens. Vote!

TIM PENNY

*House of Representatives
(1983-95)*



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There have always been those in positions of power who put politics before governing. There is, however, no question that it seems that more politicians do that today than at any other time in my 30-year period of public service. It is unfortunate that the country is more divided today than at any other time since possibly the Civil War. The two-party system has always had ideological differences. However, it feels that our elected officials are more stridently ideological, less pragmatic, and more regularly put party before country to a great detriment to our nation.

There has always been, as I said previously, a level of partisanship and ideological differences, but it does seem that the level of vitriol is more visceral than at any time in recent memory. It used to be that civility and compromise were things that we valued in our leaders. There are too many who believe that compromise is a violation of principle, that civility is a weakness to be neither cherished nor respected, and that statesmanship is a throwback to a bygone era. For far too many, winning is everything, no matter the cost to our social fabric.

We need leaders that can unite us. That respect their adversaries and are willing to do the hard work of forging common ground. We need to do a better job at educating young people about the role of citizenship, about the importance of civic action and involvement. About the need to hold our leaders to a higher standard and respect for our democracy. In a country where we are so divided and polarized, we should advocate for a radical center. Radical in its departure from the politics of personal destruction and polarization beyond the essence of our differences.

**ANTONIO
VILLARAIGOSA**

*Mayor of Los Angeles, CA
(2005-13)*

Radical as well in understanding that progress is inevitable and must be achieved as quickly as practical while painstakingly building the broad support that conveys respect for opposing views. Not all change is transformative nor overnight.

A TOXIC MEDIA ENVIRONMENT: SHIFTING FOCUS FROM POLICY TO OUTRAGE

Many formers cited the changing media landscape as a core contributor to governing no longer being good politics. They lamented the 24/7 media and social media environment of today — specifically how it has stoked our tribal natures, reinforced our self-imposed echo chambers, and shifted the view from important policy issues to issues that cause national outrage. This shifting media landscape has made it harder for officials to agree on a shared set of facts, with legislators and voters able to seek out media sources and narratives that reinforce their own opinions and theories.

Joe Crowley

(House of Representatives 1999-2019)

Our discourse is now measured by one's attention span while scrolling, pithy sound bites, and ideological hashing on social media. As a result, committee hearings are looked to for sparring rather than finding common ground, policy decisions are made based on the loudest voices on social media rather than hearing from a broad constituency, and compromise, a word once lauded by both parties, has become maligned and even shunned.

Jim Douglas

(Governor of Vermont 2003-11)

I suggest that our polarization can be summed up in three "Ms": media, migration and monomania. There's little doubt that both social and traditional outlets are contributing to the factionalism of our country. We're each in our own echo chamber, reading and listening to sentiments that reinforce those we already hold. If we limit our exposure to different ideas and opinions, we'll have fewer of both. We'll become more rigid in our views and less willing to listen to those of others.

Frank LoBiondo

(House of Representatives 1995-2019)

I was one of a handful of members who represented a district whose political leaning was opposite of my party, which forced me to forge coalitions and cross-party appeal to have electoral success... As 24-hour cable news channels and social media became dominant forces in our society, many of my

colleagues have prioritized national attention rather than noble accomplishments.

John Kitzhaber

(Governor of Oregon 1995-2003, 2011-15)

I entered politics in an era when we were Oregonians first and partisans second, when your handshake was your bond, and you let someone know if you were going to vote against their bill... This began to change with the commercialization of the Internet, which at once connected us in ways we could not possibly have imagined and separated us in ways that were both subtle and destructive. A virtual relationship is not the same as an interpersonal one, and the advent of Facebook, Twitter and other forms of anonymous social media, now allow people to attack and demonize one another without directly confronting them, without ever knowing them, without even giving them the benefit of the doubt.

Mack Mattingly

(US Senate 1981-87, Assistant Secretary General NATO 1987-90, US Ambassador to Seychelles 1992-93)

Today, media antagonism has encouraged selfishness and undermined the ability to govern, fueled unrest, and harmed the Republic. Today, as one US Senator once told me, "If one of us is captured on camera talking to someone on the other side, we are labeled not 'conservative or liberal' enough and are voted out of office. It's nearly impossible now to do what we need to do."

Mel Levine

(House of Representatives 1983-93)

We need to find a way to return to a common understanding of facts. Through the proliferation of conspiracy theories, outright lies and other distortions of reality, we have lost the common ground of a shared agreement on what is factual. Until common ground is restored regarding an acceptance and consensus of what is and is not factual, we will not achieve consensus on “good governing.” I am not sure how to accomplish this, but until we return to a common agreement of facts, it will be very difficult to achieve the progress we need to return to rewarding good governance.

Jim Greenwood

(House of Representatives 1993-2005)

The proliferation of cable news stations and politically fanatical websites has allowed large numbers of Americans to obtain their policy, social information and sense of self from within increasingly narrow bands of extreme opinion. These bias confirming communities insulate users from more dispassionate and objective sources...I also think that since this is very much a media-driven phenomenon. Organizations must be created and funded to create new information sources that can temporize the conversation, debunk propaganda and raise the political sophistication of the public. These are not easy things to accomplish, but the alternative is a very dark future.

Vic Fazio

(House of Representatives 1979-99)

A new media focused on controversy, pioneered by Roger Ailes on network TV and the Rush Limbaughs of radio on the Right, and the rise of social media as a news source that profits from playing to existing bias, can move blocks of Republican votes on the House floor. On the Left, MoveOn and other progressive groups have had a similar impact on the Democratic side.

Mark Critz

(House of Representatives 2010-13)

Twenty-five years of “government is bad and can’t be trusted” programming from Fox has refined itself

to mostly blame the Democratic party and RINOs [Republicans in Name Only] for all that is bad and to promote that ONLY the far-right wing of the Republican party can solve these pressing issues. At some point, ratings took over as the driver for all “news” organizations to become more agenda driven over news driven, causing the different belief groups to separate even further. Social media has amplified the separation of the American public into our separate groups.

Where people get their information and their news has become completely disrupted and fractured. They look only to sources which reinforce their own points of view. Newspapers and broadcast news used to impart stories we wouldn’t have been exposed to otherwise. Now no one flips through a newspaper anymore. They want to hear “news” with which they agree, but this includes misinformation upon which election choices are made. This may get people elected, but doesn’t mean those people can govern.

Lynn Schenk
House of Representatives (1993-95)

Tim Wirth

(House of Representatives 1975-87, US Senate 1987-93)

With the downward spiral of the last 30 years and the ravages of online communication, it is hard for me to imagine what sort of learning for a public official—in this case me—can be created again. Some new form of civic dialogue is needed, and I do not know what it will be. But I am happy that a wave of new people are giving it a try and I



certainly wish them well. The joy of good constituent communication is considerable, and I am very happy to have had the opportunity.

Gil Gutknecht

(House of Representatives 1995-2007)

It is not surprising then that too many in the political class focus almost exclusively on gaining or maintaining power. Every issue today is framed around the political effects rather than the merits of the policy. Honest debate has been stifled. The emergence of social media and advocacy journalism has only made matters worse. The media once served as the guard rails. No more.



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I believe good governing leads to good politics. As we see too often today, politics doesn't lead to good governing. I think of my own experience as a twice-elected governor of a major swing state and as a member of Congress for 18 years. What I've done all my career is to look at the problems that either the country or my state was facing and then try to figure out how to fix them without regard to who's going to scream and yell the loudest, or what special interest would be upset. You simply look at the problems and you come up with solutions that work for people.

I also didn't pay attention to people on the extremes. I worked to solve problems in a fair way without showing favorites on any issue, whether it was the budget or healthcare or whatever it might be. That approach to governing has always worked for me throughout my career and I was always rewarded for it by the voters. And if you do that, strip out the politics and just be fair-minded and don't show favorites, you can have success. And I tried to be consistent with that. I didn't want to say, well, this voice is more important than that voice or some other calculation that shows any sort of bias. Just climb up, take the high moral position, seize the high ground and work to solve problems.

JOHN KASICH

*House of Representatives
(1979-2001), Governor of
Ohio (2011-19)*



While there are many answers to the questions posed, I want to focus on two things. First, there is a lack of proximity to substance in all parts of the political and governing process. Second, the role of the individual's interest is out of balance with the community's interest.

Lack of Proximity to the Facts and the Substance

I find that our discourse is governed by a principle of dichotomy where one's only choices are like a light switch turning off or on. Issues have become simple slogans where you are either for x or against x. Proximity to facts and substance reveal the nuance of issues where questions are much more about decisions of what or how much to do about a specific problem. When conversations get to the details of what we are disagreeing about, we can make progress. Limited characters on social media and limited attention spans make this problem acute and it extends from citizens to those that govern.

The Rise of the Role of Individual Interest

Robert Putnam's book *Bowling Alone*, describes a trend of the decline of things that make us have an appreciation for and sense of community. We no longer bowl in teams is an example that is reflected in the title. We are in our enclaves geographically, economically, socially, and in our Facebook friends. Without an appreciation of what others contribute and what challenges we each face, we look to our individual interests in our political decisions and this impacts the support for good governing that benefits the whole community.

**SYLVIA
BURWELL**

*United States Secretary
of Health and Human
Services (2014-17)*

ROLE OF PUBLIC SERVANTS:

RESPONSIBILITIES AND RELATIONSHIPS

To make governing good politics will require changes to our electoral system and addressing our media environment. It will also require leadership from those serving in office. Public service is an honorable profession, and respondents repeatedly cited the role each official has in breaking our current cycle of legislative dysfunction. Achieving this will require those in office to serve with character, get to know their fellow officials, find agreement on a common set of facts, compromise, exercise judgement and a strong work ethic, and above all else, practice civility towards each other.

Erik Paulsen

(House of Representatives 2009-19)

I ran for office to make a difference and get things done, to make progress by building consensus and compromising. That's being a legislator. There are very few members of Congress that hold this view today...Members should be required to live in dorms so they can more easily build relationships and get to know each other—they will learn to respect each person and their ideas more.

Steve Bartlett

*(House of Representatives 1983-91,
Mayor of Dallas, TX 1991-95)*

Job one is a national commitment by the electorate to measure character. Then, the "Congressmen with Character" must re-learn some time-honored skills: listen; seek common ground; learn to disagree agreeably; find compromise that incorporate the best ideas; pass good legislation rather than sound bites; tell your constituents the truth; respect the process, the institutions, the people involved.

Susan Molinari

(House of Representatives 1990-97)

During my political career I served as a proud Republican and in several leadership positions. However, I was also a member of other groups that defined my responsibilities and brought me together with Democrats...Very few things, however, defined our "team" than our committee assignments.

Appropriators vs. Authorizers. It did not matter if you were in the minority or majority, you were loyal to your Chair and Ranking member. And they had your back regardless of politics. We compromised and coordinated and sometimes campaigned against each other. But when we were working towards a goal, that's just what we did.

Dave McCurdy

(House of Representatives 1981-95)

To be elected a Representative is one of the highest honors and most awesome responsibilities a person can achieve. To serve is noble, but to successfully represent your constituency requires hard work, the ability to listen, maintain focus, and work with others—including many who disagree with you and more recently to have a thick political skin...Finding common facts, areas of agreement and in many instances compromise on areas of disagreement without abandoning your principles...The exercise of judgment does not mean turning your voting card over to party leadership, blindly following opinion polls or ideological pundits.

Tom Tauke

(House of Representatives 1979-91)

The Congress is simply no longer fulfilling its three core legislative responsibilities: authorizing, appropriating, and overseeing...While there are many causes for this dynamic, I believe that the major problem is that members of Congress are



simply not spending enough time in Washington fulfilling their legislative responsibilities. As members spend less and less time on their legislative responsibilities, more power and responsibility is transferred to a handful of policymakers and staff.

Joe Crowley

(House of Representatives 1999-2019)

Politics and governing weren't always at odds with each other...I learned early on that forging relationships with my colleagues on the other side of the aisle simply meant I could do my job better. Finessing a key change through a committee mark-up or drafting a bipartisan bill that could actually see the light of day were once seen as positives and not negatives. That's not to say that bipartisanship doesn't exist anymore. It does. But in today's hyper-partisan world, it is no longer embraced in the way it once was.

James Lightfoot

(House of Representatives 1985-97)

We need our country back from the lifetime, professional politicians who only understand re-election

rather than governance. Sure, there are more risks in running for office in that scenario. However, that is the way the voice of the common person is heard and Congress returns to a governing body.

Paul McHale

(House of Representatives 1993-99, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense 2003-09)

Electronic voting procedures on the House floor should be changed, so that members are required to remain on the floor during debate—allowing them to get to know each other—and to discuss potential compromise across party lines. That was my experience in the Pennsylvania state legislature. Lincoln once said, "I don't like that man. I need to get to know him better." Wisdom.

Vic Fazio

(House of Representatives 1979-99)

Modern travel and technology have made service on the Hill far more impersonal. Families move to Washington at the members' peril. Members' jetting in and out for two or three days, while communicating electronically on many occasions, has reduced human interaction and limited

friendships, particularly across the aisle. All of these factors and more have made finding common ground on major issues almost impossible.

Dennis DeConcini

(US Senate 1977-95)

The present political situation which has been there even before President Trump was elected is very toxic...Unfortunately, members of Congress in both bodies are so caught up by being for their survival politically that very few are willing to put the country first. Not that way when I served. We disagreed but worked together. Part of the problem is there is no reward in working together.

Bob Livingston

(House of Representatives 1977-99)

The role of Congress is to provide oversight and today, little oversight is had. Congressional schedules should be revised to provide more time for evidential hearings. Members should be instructed that all fundraising activities must be confined to non-working hours. (i.e. after 5 PM on workdays)

Bill Gradison

(House of Representatives 1975-93)

During 18 years in the House (always in the minority), I found ways to achieve important legislative changes working across the aisle (in this case with the majority) and although I usually supported my party's position there were important issues on which I did not follow my leadership or the president of my party. In those instances, I didn't consider myself a moderate or a maverick, just a member looking to support positions which made the most sense to me (and, hopefully, my constituents) whether the sponsors were Rs or Ds.

David Shulkin

(United States Secretary of Veterans Affairs 2017-18, Under Secretary of Veterans Affairs for Health 2015-17)

With Washington growing more partisan by the day, I tried to keep the VA out of political fights as much as possible. I pushed policy issues and visited members of Congress on Capitol Hill, without regard to political party. I felt strongly that an organization

like VA, should be nonpartisan. In my experience as Secretary however, the political appointees did not feel the same and were constantly trying to use veterans for political wins and to demonstrate partisan policy victories...My government experience has led me to believe that agencies that offer direct services to citizens, such as VA, needs a new model of governance...The agency would remain a government entity but with a structure that would allow it to develop strategies and make necessary changes, free of political influence.

I was a “public servant,” not a “politician.” I make the distinction between one who solves problems in the public interest, and the politician who says what you want him or her to say – and always does whatever is politically expedient to get your vote or your money – with the highest priority being self-interest – staying in power.

Claudine Schneider

(House of Representatives 1981-91)

Frank Keating

(Governor of Oklahoma 1995-2003)

I served in both houses of the Oklahoma legislature and as governor for two terms. All that time, the legislature was overwhelmingly Democratic...I worked closely with both parties and told my Democratic sometime adversaries that trading water was not a policy, and that if the USS Oklahoma went down, we would all go down together. The last people laughing would be the Texans. It worked. The Texans didn't laugh.

Joseph Wright Jr.

(Director of the Office of Management and Budget 1988-89)

President Ronald Reagan viewed good politics as a requirement for good governing, but his campaigns were always polite and respectful—even when he disagreed...He accomplished all of this without denigrating his opponents. He was strong, but always a gentleman. He proved that you can accomplish many things without being nasty. During debates, he smiled rather than snarled. We need another leader like this to get us back on track as a strong, kind nation.

Mack Mattingly

(US Senate 1981-87, Assistant Secretary General NATO 1987-90, US Ambassador to Seychelles 1992-93)

Read, listen & learn. Because citizenship, history, commitment to unselfish service, and the ability to govern, along with a healthy dose of optimism, are the foundation to good governance, and critical to our future.

Scott McCallum

(Governor of Wisconsin 2001-03)

We have become two tribes which now have difficulty even agreeing on facts, or in listening to other viewpoints. It has reached the point where some resort to personal attacks rather than discussion of the issue at hand...The more difficult question posed is “What to do about it?” It is possible to reverse the downward trend with strong, empathetic leadership. It must be done with several leaders in unison, beginning with small steps of trust for the greater good.

John Kitzhaber

(Governor of Oregon 1995-2003, 2011-15)

Over the years, we have lost our adhesiveness ... our civility and sense of common purpose, we have somehow let them slip through our fingers and we are poorer for the loss. We cannot turn back the clock, but we can make a different set of choices for the future: partisanship is a choice and so is civility.



It's hard to pin down any one or two causes of the disturbing changes in governance. But the hardening of partisan identities has been one major factor: disagreement, and on some issues, polarization, are inevitable in a democracy, but partisanship is not. Yet that's the path we've taken even against the wishes and warnings of the Founders.

Instead of a Congress in which legislation moves upward — introduction, subcommittee, committee, floor — today in both Houses control is exercised from the top down. Conformity, not judgment, is the operating principle.

Outside the Congress, hardliners learned to focus on party primaries to elect candidates who would enter their legislative careers seeing themselves not as members of a deliberative body, but as warriors for a cause. In a Congress in which the majority party exercises all power and the minority none, every issue becomes a battle for control.

Finally, America has changed as the people have sorted themselves into enclaves of commonality within gerrymandered districts in which retaining one's seat requires fealty to the acceptable club. Not an easy knot to untie or cut through.

**MICKEY
EDWARDS**

*House of Representatives
(1977-93)*



An argument can be made that good government, when recognized by the voting public is still good politics. Incumbents with proven track records in areas of governance that resonate with voters still get re-elected. The challenge is that good governance requires making difficult and sometimes unpopular decisions.

Effective policy rarely translates into overnight results and it doesn't always dovetail neatly into party platforms. There are always interested and well-resourced groups ready to ensure that voters get their side of the story, and that is not always a formula for balanced and unbiased information.

Knowing that we get what we incentivize, the electorate should understand that too often, politicians and political campaigns are rewarded for being the most effective at creating division and mistrust. The fact that many voters have become more politically polarized has also led to an intolerance for some requisite ingredients for good governing, including pragmatism, innovation and collaboration. It's a fact that you can't govern if you can't get elected, so it's understandable that candidates and their political operatives speak the language and function in ways that voters have rewarded.

We will see those behaviors change if and when voters regularly give elected officials and candidates their vote for earnestly demonstrating the will to make difficult, sometimes non-partisan, and possibly unpopular decisions for the overall benefit of those they serve. That will incentivize good government because it will translate more clearly into good politics.

**RICHARD J.
BERRY**

*Mayor of Albuquerque, NM
(2009-17)*

THE NEED FOR CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT:

CHAMPIONING THOSE WHO CHOOSE TO GOVERN

Can we break this endless cycle of legislative dysfunction and hyper-partisanship? Respondents agreed that we can, but emphasized that doing so will not happen overnight. It will take leadership from those who serve, and a willingness and engagement from their constituents to hold them accountable. Governing can be good politics, but only if we the people champion those who make it so and get engaged in doing the hard work of creating a better future.

Mike Capuano

*(Mayor of Somerville, MA 1990-99,
House of Representatives 1999-2019)*

So ask yourself—if those candidates keep being elected and they do exactly as they have done and promised to do, whose fault is that? I suggest we each look in the mirror for the answer...It is up to each one of us to embrace a more mature and realistic view of humanity and start supporting candidates who embrace compromise as a necessary and admirable virtue in all aspects of real life.

James Florio

*(House of Representatives 1975-90, Governor
of New Jersey 1990-94)*

Why is it, in this time of dramatic change, that our governmental institutions do not appear to be working very well?...We need leadership that is willing to get the general public—real average people and not just special interest groups—engaged in, and informed about, making public policies. Engaged in, because that's how our system works—Participatory Democracy. The system doesn't work unless we all work at making it work.

Joe Crowley

(House of Representatives 1999-2019)

As citizens, it is in our collective interests to demand more from our leaders and our government. But change can only happen if the people and elected leaders alike place a higher value on governing, solutions, and progress than on tweets, clicks, and likes.

All is not lost...Most heartening of all is the new activism by citizens of all ages, races and geographies. From the largest women's march ever to Black Lives Matter events in large and small towns across America, to a cry for civility and compassion – people are speaking out. Most critically, they are also voting –the most American of activities and the one that defines us as a democracy. New engagement in the political process and my belief in the strength of our nation gives me hope.

Allyson Schwartz

(House of Representatives 2005-15)

Doug Bereuter

(House of Representatives 1979-2004)

We need a sustained nationwide effort, citizen-by-citizen, of voters who ask and hold responsible the challengers and incumbents with these two related



questions: Are you a “partisan warrior” or will you be a “legislator”? Will you work as a “legislator” with your colleagues for the common good by attempting to advance the interests of everyone in your district or state, not just the citizens of your party?

Henson Moore III

(House of Representatives 1975-87, United States Deputy Secretary of Energy 1989-92)

Good politics or governing cannot exist when there is a deep divide preventing any compromises necessary to govern. Each side of the divide is focused on the defeat or destruction of the other, not solving problems. Each believes that total control of government will produce good government, therefore that is good politics. Compromises are viewed just as that, and not good governing. Politics and governing reflect the people and the people are divided.

Steve Bartlett

(House of Representatives 1983-91, Mayor of Dallas, TX 1991-95)

How to restore a healthy relationship between politics and governance...The first requirement is for the American people to decide “ENOUGH” and hold candidates accountable to good governance standards. Vote for men and women of good character, and resolutely vote against the demagogues.



“

Whether our economy and society succeed depends on whether we reestablish effective government. And yet, while there are movements to address specific issues, there is no large national movement to promote effective government.

The requisites of effective government are the willingness to engage in the give-and-take of principled compromise, to focus on facts and analysis in decision-making, and to make politically difficult decisions, especially when costs are shorter term and benefits longer term.

Many complain about our system's deficiencies, but complaining is not a strategy. We each need to get involved. Among the many efforts already afoot are robust campaigns to accomplish reforms to incentivize candidates to move away from polarizing extremes and toward pragmatic agreement, such as ranked-choice voting, open primaries, and redistricting by bipartisan commissions. There are also potential (and controversial) congressional reforms, such as eliminating the Senate filibuster and restoring modest earmarking to facilitate the legislative process. And we can all interact with elected officials—through emails and other means—to insist they commit to making our system work.

One great hope I have is that someone will fund an effective, interactive social media campaign to persuade the American people to support candidates who believe in effective governance.

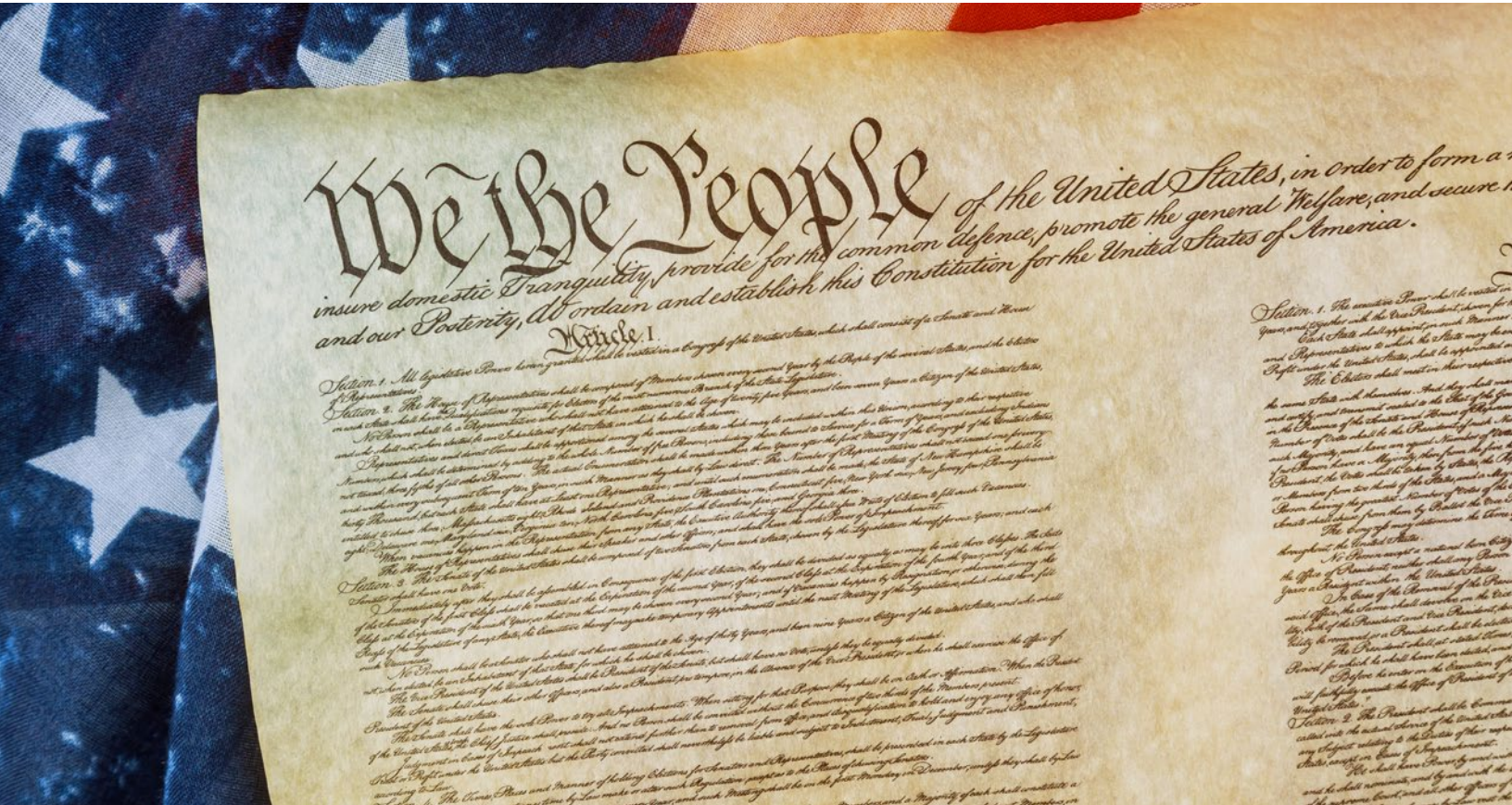
I think the odds are favorable that we get back on track. We have a dynamic society that could produce constructive, now-unforeseen changes; a history of political resilience; and politics can change rapidly in America. But there are no guarantees, and the process could be long and messy.

BOB RUBIN

*United States Secretary
of the Treasury (1995-99)*

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE:

THE START OF A NATIONAL CONVERSATION



A thousand years of public service cannot fit in one report, nor will governing become good politics solely with the change of a presidential administration or start of a new Congress. In the year ahead, we will continue to engage with this audience and our fellow Americans to delve deeper into the issues and solutions they have identified, and use this report as the jumping off point for a dialogue about how to make governing good politics.

One item worth noting is that in almost every response, each author ended with a sense of optimism—a belief that governing can, and will once again, make good politics. They also emphasized that we all have a role to play. There is no silver bullet solution to fix what ails our democracy, and it is up to each of us as citizens to engage in good faith and foster a better future.

To do so, we will be engaging these respondents, subject matter experts, and the public on the issues and solutions raised in this report to help facilitate a national dialogue and co-create a roadmap to repair our democracy. We will also be digging deeper in future reports and publications into the myriad root causes—political, economic, cultural, technological and others—that prompted the division, distrust, and dysfunction in our governing institutions.

The factors which have led us to this moment have been long in the making and change will not happen overnight. Breaking the cycle of legislative gridlock and partisan dysfunction will be a long-term process which takes renewed focus and energy. We hope this report can serve as a catalyst for that effort.

