

FORMER MEMBERS OF CONGRESS FOR COMMON GROUND
www.FMOCforCommonGround.org

Dear Candidate for Congress:

We are all former Members of Congress - and all partisans. We do not recoil from the term, or from the concept of partisanship.

Although political parties were not mentioned in the Constitution or considered directly by the Framers, they have been a core part of American democracy from the beginning and are central to every democracy. Parties are the way we organize to debate our differences; the way we organize Congress to do its work; the way we organize to offer citizens choices in elections. They pave the way for the orderly and peaceful transfer of power.

None of us shrank from partisan debates while in Congress or from the partisan contests getting there. During our time in Congress, partisans on the other side may have been our opponents on some bills and our adversaries on some issues. They were not, however, the enemy.

We often had heated debates over policy, but we avoided challenging the motives or good will of those on the other side. At least as often as debates formed on partisan lines, we found ourselves with allies from the other side of the aisle, aligned against some similarly diverse and bipartisan group who viewed things in a different way. An adversary one day could – and did – easily become an ally the next. All of us shared an overriding concern in common: we were in office to solve the problems facing Americans at home and America abroad.

Today, the problems we face as a nation - challenges to our position in the global economy, challenges to our role defending democracy around the world, challenges from terrorists seeking to do us great harm, challenges of a faltering economy, challenges in education, energy, immigration, climate, health and countless other areas - are as great as any this country has faced in our lifetimes.

Sadly, faced with those challenges, our political system has not shown itself to be up to the task.

Congress appears gripped by zero-sum game partisanship. The goal often seems to be more to devastate the other side (the enemy, no longer the honorable adversary) than to find common ground to solve problems, much less to have a spirited but civil debate about how to do so.

The divisive and mean-spirited way debate often occurs inside Congress is encouraged and repeated outside: on cable news shows, in blogs and in rallies. Members who far exceed the bounds of normal and respectful discourse are not viewed with shame but are lionized, treated as celebrities, rewarded with cable television appearances, and enlisted as magnets for campaign fund-raisers.

Meanwhile, lawmakers who try to address problems and find workable solutions across party lines find themselves denigrated by an angry fringe of partisans, people unhappy that their representatives would even deign to work with the enemy. When bipartisan ideas are advanced, they are met by partisan derision.

In a politically diverse but ultimately centrist nation, it is axiomatic that the country's major problems are going to have to be solved through compromises worked out between the parties. That's especially the case for the problems that require tough solutions - like convincing taxpayers to endure some short-term pain for the promise of long-term fiscal stability. That will require partisans on both sides to give ground on some of their cherished beliefs, to lose some traction on a "wedge issue" that can be used in campaigns against the other side, in order to find the broad coalition necessary to make a policy work.

Both parties share in the blame for this sorry state of affairs. Still, without action by both parties to work together to address the problems that face our country through serious, respectful and civil discussion and debate, the prognosis for our politics - and with it our economic health and our security - is grim.

As partisan veterans, we join together to advocate a change in approach- a change in rhetoric and tone that can lead to a focus on problem-solving. This needs to begin now, especially as we head into the heat of the 2010 campaign.

We are wary of campaign promises that are not always within a candidate's ability to deliver. But, we know there is one on which each candidate and eventual Member of the 112th Congress can make good – for the institution and for the Nation: to conduct campaigns for Congress with decency and respect toward opponents, to be truthful in presenting information about self and opponents, to engage in good faith debate about the issues and each other's record, to refrain from personal attack, and if elected, to behave in office according to these same principles, recognizing that all Members endeavor honorably to serve the Nation and their constituents and to advance honestly held beliefs about what is best for the country, and that all must eventually reconcile their differences in the national interest.

James Abourezk (S. Dakota)
Bill Alexander (Arkansas)
Jim Bacchus (Florida)
Skip Bafalis (Florida)
Mike Barnes (Maryland)
Jim Bates (California)
Berkley Bedell (Iowa)
Helen Delich Bentley
(Maryland)
Jim Blanchard (Michigan)
Sherwood Boehlert (New York)
Lindy Boggs (Louisiana)
Bill Brock (Tennessee)
William Brodhead (Michigan)
Glen Browder (Alabama)
Jack Buechner (Missouri)
Bill D. Burlison (Missouri)
Yvonne Brathwaite Burke
(California)
Bev Byron (Maryland)
Bo Callaway (Georgia)
Bill Carney (New York)
Bob Carr (Michigan)
Dick Chrysler (Michigan)
Bill Clinger (Pennsylvania)
John B. Conlan (Arizona)
E. Thomas Coleman (Missouri)
George "Buddy" Darden
(Georgia)
Lawrence DeNardis
(Connecticut)
Tom Downey (New York)
Bob Edgar (Pennsylvania)
Jack Edwards (Alabama)
Mickey Edwards (Oklahoma)
Karan English (Arizona)
Phil English (Pennsylvania)
Ben Erdreich (Alabama)
Dave Evans (Indiana)
Victor Fazio (California)
Geraldine A. Ferraro (New
York)
Michael P. Forbes (New York)
Harold Ford Sr. (Tennessee)
Bill Frenzel (Minnesota)
Lou Frey (Florida)
Martin Frost (Texas)
Don Fuqua (Florida)
Robert "Bob" Garcia (New
York)
Dan Glickman (Kansas)
Frank J. Guarini (New Jersey)

Gil Gutknecht (Minnesota)
Chuck Hagel (Nebraska)
John Paul Hammerschmidt
(Arkansas)
Orval Hansen (Idaho)
Michael J. Harrington
(Massachusetts)
Gary Hart (Colorado)
Dennis Hertel (Michigan)
George Hochbrueckner (New
York)
Marjorie S. Holt (Maryland)
Darlene Hooley (Oregon)
Joan Kelly Horn (Missouri)
Amo Houghton (New York)
Jerry Huckabee (Louisiana)
William "Bill" H. Hudnut III
(Indiana)
William J. Hughes (New
Jersey)
Earl Hutto (Florida)
Ed Jenkins (Georgia)
John Jenrette (South Carolina)
James R. Jones (Oklahoma)
William J. Keating (Ohio)
Barbara B. Kennelly
(Connecticut)
Martha Keys (Kansas)
Herb Klein (New Jersey)
Scott Klug (Wisconsin)
Ray Kogovsek (Colorado)
Jim Kolbe (Arizona)
John J. LaFalce (New York)
H. Martin Lancaster (North
Carolina)
Larry LaRocco (Idaho)
Jim Leach (Iowa)
Jim Ross Lightfoot (Iowa)
Jim Lloyd (California)
Ken Lucas (Oklahoma)
Bill Luther (Minnesota)
Andrew Maguire (New Jersey)
Marjorie Margolies
(Pennsylvania)
Dawson Mathis (Georgia)
Romano L. Mazzoli (Kentucky)
Mike McCormack
(Washington)
Matt McHugh (New York)
C. Thomas McMillen
(Maryland)
Michael R. McNulty (New York)

Daniel A. Mica (Florida)
Bob Michel (Illinois)
Enid Greene Mickelsen (Utah)
Ab Mikva (Illinois)
Dan Miller (Florida)
Jim Moody (Wisconsin)
Connie Morella (Maryland)
Bruce A. Morrison
(Connecticut)
Lucien N. Nedzi (Michigan)
George R. Nethercutt, Jr.
(Washington)
Mary Rose Oakar (Ohio)
Bob Packwood (Oregon)
Jerry M. Patterson (California)
Douglas "Pete" Peterson
(Florida)
David D. Phelps (Illinois)
John Porter (Pennsylvania)
Albert H. Quie (Minnesota)
Tom Railsback (Illinois)
Jay Rhodes (Arizona)
Marty Russo (Illinois)
Martin Olav Sabo (Minnesota)
Jim Santini (Nevada)
Ron Sarasin (Connecticut)
Tom Sawyer (Ohio)
Lynn Schenk (California)
Patricia Schroeder (Colorado)
John J. H. "Joe" Schwarz
(Michigan)
Robert N. Shamansky (Ohio)
E. Clay Shaw (Florida)
David Skaggs (Colorado)
Jim Slattery (Kansas)
Lawrence J. Smith (Florida)
Nick Smith (Michigan)
Peter Smith (Vermont)
Richard H. Stallings (Idaho)
Richard Swett (New
Hampshire)
Jim Symington (Missouri)
Tom Tauke (Iowa)
Esteban Edward Torres
(California)
Robert A. Underwood (Guam)
Pat Williams (Montana)
Tim Wirth (Colorado)
Lester L. Wolff (New York)
Howard Wolpe (Michigan)
Albert R. Wynn (Maryland)
Leo C. Zeferetti (New York)