

PRESIDENT'S LETTER



Creating Space to Govern

2013 was a tough year for American democracy. But there is no need to despair, we have been here before. America has endured wars, depressions, recessions, and all manners of scandal and sometimes our federal government just gets stuck in the mud. In March of 1822, an editorial in *The Saturday Evening Post* described the accomplishments of our nation's 17th Congress as: "Procrastination. Debate. . . . New committees. New Reports. New speeches . . . and, finally, indefinite postponements." Harry Truman famously ran against a "do nothing Congress in 1948," and the government shutdown and "politics of personal destruction" during the Clinton-Gingrich battles were pretty bare-knuckled. Fortunately American democracy bends, but it does not break. At times like these, the Bipartisan Policy Center's (BPC) approach and leadership are needed more than ever.

Last year, the Senate and House took turns failing to execute their most basic obligations. In the Republican-controlled House, gridlock over the government's finances led to a shutdown that harmed millions of Americans. A few months later, the Democrat-led Senate could not resolve conflicts over presidential appointments invoking the so-called "nuclear option" and ending the century-old tradition of protecting minority rights in the confirmation process.

The systemic breakdown on display raises some basic questions: Why do political factions that once sought solutions now pursue obstruction? Why are congressional leaders no longer able or willing to corral their party's maverick fringes to advance a national agenda? And most important, can anything be done to get things back on track?

The answers to these questions—and the path to a solution—center around a single phenomenon: the breakdown in trust. Throughout the history of democratic government, trust has been the key to bridging policy disputes. That's why restoring confidence in analysis, respectful deliberation, and balanced advocacy is fundamental to BPC's mission.

BPC provides a safe and politically balanced forum for diverse interests to develop consensus solutions. These efforts are led by a corps of highly respected political leaders and supported by a team of top-notch subject-matter experts and analysts. In 2013, BPC projects, reports, forums, and workshops addressed a series of challenging issues including:

- Replacing Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac;
- Effectively implementing Dodd-Frank;
- Reducing health care costs while increasing access, quality, and personal privacy;
- Confronting dangerous situations in the Middle East and increased radicalization here at home;
- Assessing the costs and benefits of immigration reform, options to improve border security, and a process to effectively and equitably integrate millions of people into the fabric of American society;

- Maximizing the benefits of our energy boom while moving toward a low-carbon economy; and
- Developing the intellectual foundation and political motivation for tax and entitlement reform.

BPC's unique process is essential to bridging differences and achieving consensus:

We don't stack the deck: Our projects are led by experts with diverse experience and divergent interests.

We respect data and conduct transparent analysis: BPC policy recommendations are based upon detailed studies that are broadly distributed.

We fight for what we believe in: Once a task force develops detailed recommendations, we work as a group to advocate for all aspects of our agreement.

We understand the latitude and limitations of our role: BPC exists to advance the debate by digging deeper and pressing further and faster than is often possible inside government. We then provide space for policymakers to engage in ideas that stray from single-party orthodoxy. Our efforts demonstrate what can be accomplished when experts and passionate advocates are brought together in an environment that enables constructive deliberation.

The second way BPC works to restore trust is by promoting thoughtful political reform from the outside in. The highlight of these efforts in 2013 was the creation of BPC's Commission on Political Reform (CPR). CPR's co-chairs are national leaders with storied careers in Congress, the executive branch, and state government. Tom Daschle, Trent Lott, Olympia Snowe, Dirk Kempthorne, and Dan Glickman are working with 25

other volunteer and religious leaders, veterans, business executives, academics, state and local elected officials, and journalists to understand the causes and consequences of America's partisan divide and to recommend reforms to help achieve shared national goals. Among CPR's efforts last year was a series of National Conversations on American Unity launched at the Reagan Presidential Library and continued at leading institutions across the country.

BPC—through our affiliated entity, the Bipartisan Policy Center Advocacy Network (BPCAN)—also engages directly in the political process. We conduct aggressive advocacy, provide analysis, work with congressional offices to develop legislative proposals, and push federal decision makers to consider ideas that can generate broad bipartisan support.

The hopeful news is that 2013 also demonstrated that our political leaders remain capable of real collaboration when given the right incentives. The bipartisan budget agreement negotiated by Budget Committee Chairs Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and Representative Paul Ryan (R-WI) was developed in an atmosphere of urgency, respect, and mutual trust. The process was also strongly supported by the Senate majority leader and the speaker of the House.

Our goal in 2014, and the years to come, is to encourage and reinforce policymakers with the fortitude, creativity, and commitment to take on big challenges. The American people deserve better than gridlock. BPC will continue our work to support a government empowered by substance, allegiance, and trust.



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