Members of the Commission on Political Reform at the first Town Hall in California.
Americans are rightly concerned about the federal government’s ability to solve problems. BPC’s Governance Program works to understand the true causes of political polarization and to develop proposals to increase government’s capacity and competence. BPC works to diminish the partisan intensity that undermines deliberation and collaboration, as well as make recommendations to increase government’s functionality, despite the polarization in Congress and across the country. Heartfelt ideological differences and aggressive debate are the engines of a functioning democracy. BPC’s Governance Program is focused on creating a political environment that can produce effective and resilient public policy.

COMMISSION ON POLITICAL REFORM
The Commission on Political Reform engages the public in a national campaign to ensure that the United States continues to be a dynamic democracy. Commissioners—such as political leaders, scholars, communications experts, social activists, and religious leaders—connect with the public through national conversations and via social media. The commission launched in 2013 with two main purposes—to understand the causes and consequences of America’s partisan political divide and to advocate for specific reforms to help Americans achieve shared national goals. The commission is considering concrete but achievable reforms to the nation’s congressional gridlock and electoral system dysfunction while promoting public service. They are shaping policy recommendations for release in June 2014 with an eye toward making U.S. institutions work better in a polarized world.

DEMOCRACY PROJECT
The Democracy Project conducts research and advocacy on improvements to U.S. democratic institutions. The Democracy Project focused on strengthening civil discourse in government and addressing institutional and structural barriers that make it more difficult for politicians to work together. After all, many of the nation’s greatest achievements have resulted from principled compromises between Democrats and Republicans.

GOVERNORS’ COUNCIL
In 2013, the Governors’ Council key issues include Medicaid and workforce development. Founded in 2011, the Governors’ Council enables BPC to better understand the changing landscape outside Washington and to promote policies to improve the federal-state relationship. Many governors believe that this relationship is increasingly falling short of the ideal. Too often, policies adopted at the national level result in federal overreach, impose unfunded mandates, trigger unintended consequences, and stifle state innovation. The council brings together a bipartisan group of former governors to offer practical solutions to public policy challenges critical to the nation.
COMMISSION ON POLITICAL REFORM

HIGHLIGHTS

The Commission on Political Reform Launches
The Commission on Political Reform formally launched in March 2013 at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Library in Simi Valley, California, where commissioners focused on the effects of increasing polarization among elected officials and the electorate itself. The event included an interactive public town hall hosted by USA TODAY's Susan Page and a series of panels on hyper-partisanship in Congress and obstacles to public service at the state and federal levels. Prior to the event, BPC and USA TODAY conducted a national opinion poll on political polarization and public engagement in politics. That same week, USA TODAY ran a front-page story about the poll and the commission.

A Town Hall at the National Constitution Center
A second commission event was held in July 2013 in Philadelphia at the National Constitution Center. The commission focused on barriers to public service and ways to encourage a new generation of Americans to serve their country. The event included a public town hall session that touched on topics such as encouraging greater public service, reforming the presidential nomination process, and reducing the influence of special interests.

“We need to remember that we are still Americans and ought to be working together for this country, not just the parties.”
—Commission Co-Chair and former Idaho Governor Dirk Kempthorne

Political Partisanship Mirrors Public
“Democrats and Republicans are not just more divided ideologically but also less collaborative in practice than at any time in our careers. Even more troublingly, we suspect that much of America is similarly riven along party lines, goaded to partisanship by increasingly shrill voices in politics, the news media and well-funded interests.”
—Commission Co-Chairs and BPC Senior Fellows Olympia Snowe and Dan Glickman in USA TODAY
Talking Electoral Reform in Ohio

The commission wrapped up the year in October at the Ohio State University in Columbus, Ohio. The commission discussed challenges in election administration and possible electoral reforms. The commission was joined by Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted, Minnesota Secretary of State Mark Ritchie, former Ohio Governors Ted Strickland and Bob Taft, and former Speaker of the Ohio State House Jo Ann Davidson. The co-chairs of the Presidential Commission on Election Administration, Robert Bauer and Ben Ginsberg, joined Husted and Ritchie for a discussion on modernizing voter registration and improving election administration. Participants throughout the day referred to the third BPC and USA TODAY national opinion poll, this time focusing on elections and electoral reform, which again was covered in a front-page story in USA TODAY.

America the Partisan?

“Americans who blame Washington politicians for the polarization and gridlock of the nation’s politics might want to look in the mirror. Like the elected officials they decry, voters tend to automatically retreat into partisan camps even when they disagree with the party line on policy.

A USA TODAY/BPC Poll shows that the officials who have been unable to avert the automatic spending cuts known as sequestration—the current debate centers more on who’s to blame for them—in some ways reflect constituents who view the opposition party as deeply untrustworthy and its positions extreme. Though most Republican and Democratic voters say American politics are more polarized than the American people are, the findings indicate that on that they’re wrong.”

—from “Political Partisanship Mirrors Public” by Susan Page in USA TODAY
USA TODAY and BPC’s Commission on Political Reform conducted several polls examining public attitudes about polarization in politics, public service, and voting and the electoral process. The following are just some of the findings as they appeared in USA TODAY:

“Partisanship Mirrors Public”
March 6, 2013

BPC / USA TODAY National Survey on Political Polarization.
“The poll reveals a deeply polarized America, one where voters take cues from political parties. Nevertheless, the poll also shows there are many potential areas for agreement in political discourse. The commission is using these results to engage the public in conversations and to develop policy to improve a polarized political system.”

“Public Service Valued; Politics—Not So Much”
July 22, 2013

BPC / USA TODAY National Survey on Public Service.
“Americans are more interested in community service than in running for office. They are also largely in favor of stipends and educational incentives for those involved in full-time public service, like AmeriCorps or Peace Corps. A majority of Americans are even in favor of mandatory national service for young adults. The commission is developing recommendations to improve opportunities for public service.”

“American Support Fine-Tuning Election Policy”
October 15, 2013

“The poll showed an expected divide between Republicans and Democrats on electoral reform—with the former prioritizing the integrity of the voting process and the latter focused on minimizing barriers to the polls. Still, some traditionally Republican and Democratic positions did not hold: e.g., a majority of respondents favored requiring people to show ID when voting. This poll helps the commission understand highly charged issues as it examines electoral reform.”
USA TODAY's Susan Page moderates a discussion about making government work with Co-Founder of the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate Victoria Kennedy, BPC Senior Fellow and former Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman, former Ohio Governor Bob Taft, former Speaker of the Ohio House of Representatives Jo Ann Davidson, BPC Governors’ Council member and former Ohio Governor Ted Strickland, former Representative Henry Bonilla, former Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman, and National Review Online’s Reihan Salam.

I think this Millennial generation ... is showing civic habits on par with the Greatest Generation in terms of their interest in issues, their willingness to volunteer—their willingness to serve is very important for impact."

—Commission on Political Reform Member John Bridgeland

Social media has played an integral role in the commission’s three national town hall events: the commission reached more than 35,000 viewers during live webcasts of its 2013 events.

**Coming Up in 2014**

**Town Hall.** The Commission on Political Reform heads to Boston for its final town hall at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum in partnership with the Edward M. Kennedy Institute for the United States Senate.

**Service and Reform.** In June, the commission will release its comprehensive report on encouraging public service and reforms to the U.S. congressional and electoral systems.

**Engage the Public.** The commission will then take its recommendations across the country and engage the public in an effort to reform and improve U.S. democratic institutions.
Money in Politics
The Democracy Project, in conjunction with the Campaign Finance Institute, convened a working group of expert scholars to assess the current campaign finance literature and to develop a roadmap for future research priorities. Several scholars from the group wrote and published papers assessing topics such as independent campaign spending and how new technologies might affect small-donor fund-raising and broader participation in the electoral process. The working group released a report that outlined an agenda and research priorities for future scholarship in the field of money and politics.

Election Administration
Democracy Project staff advised the Presidential Commission on Election Administration—specifically in its work to recommend improvements to election administration across the country. BPC facilitated several meetings with election administration stakeholders and advocacy groups to help inform the Presidential Commission on Election Administration commissioners. Through meetings of state and local administrators, the project led discussions on election administration challenges and problems encountered during the 2012 elections, such as election capacity and long lines. State and local administrators from Virginia, Maryland, Kansas, Ohio, and Washington, D.C., participated in the meetings. The Democracy Project also hosted a series of meetings in Ohio with the Ohio Secretary of State’s office, local election administrators, political scientists, legal scholars, and advocates to discuss changes to the Ohio redistricting process as well as election administration more generally.

Coming Up in 2014

**Elections and Redistricting.** The Democracy Project, in conjunction with the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, will work on election administration and redistricting reforms currently being debated in the Ohio legislature that may appear before the voters in 2014.

**Election Administration.** The Presidential Commission on Election Administration (PCEA) presented its report and recommendations on January 22, 2014. BPC staff assisted this effort providing research and strategic advice. In 2014, BPC plans to administer the next phase of this work, disseminating PCEA recommendations to a diverse group of stakeholders and identifying key states where the PCEA recommendations will have the most resonance and impact. BPC will collaborate with other groups and scholars who are working on election administration issues related to PCEA recommendations.

The Great Communicator:
The Democracy Project and Maryland Public Television held a screening of select clips from the American Public Television miniseries, *The Reagan Presidency*. Panelists discussed challenges during the Reagan presidency and highlighted bipartisan lessons to apply to today’s hyper-partisan political climate.
Democracy Project Director John Fortier hosts a panel discussion with former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Henry Cisneros, Director of The Reagan Presidency Chip Duncan, and BPC Senior Fellow and former Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott.
GOVERNORS’ COUNCIL
HIGHLIGHTS

Medicaid and the States
A 2013 report by the Governors’ Council, *Making Federalism Work: The Governors’ Council Medicaid Recommendations*, includes a number of substantive reforms to the Medicaid program and calls on the administration and Congress to allow states to enroll dual eligible individuals in coordinated care. “Medicaid is the largest state-federal partnership program and requires intense collaboration between states and the federal government,” wrote the governors in the report. “It presents an ongoing source of budgetary strain for both parties.” BPCAN, with the help of the Governors’ Council, continues to advocate for the council’s recommendations to key elected and appointed officials.

Governing the Nation
Former governors bring a unique perspective to the Senate along with a desire to get things done. The council collaborated with senators to form a Governors’ Caucus to provide this pragmatic group with the support to tackle difficult issues, ranging from the budget to emergency relief.

Former CNN Correspondent Kathleen Koch moderates a panel with former Governors Jim Douglas, Ted Strickland, Linda Lingle, Phil Bredesen, and Mike Rounds.
The Governors’ Council showed support for the Marketplace Fairness Act, calling on Congress to address the current inability of states to require online retailers to collect sales taxes. Following up in its recommendations on both the Medicaid waiver process and Medicaid as a whole, the council met with Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius. The governors also met with senators, including several of the former governors currently serving in the Senate, to advance their Medicaid reforms.

**Coming Up in 2014**

**Workforce Development.** In early 2014, the council plans to release its report, which will focus on four key areas: aligning and integrating existing programs; strengthening educational programs other than traditional four-year college; decentralizing existing programs to more closely meet local and regional needs; and standardizing the collection of data about jobs, skills, and education.

**BPCAN Impact**

**April 22, 2013**

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