

## **Finding the Middle Ground: The Art of Governing (Or “Compromise” is *not* a four-letter word)**

***Study Group for the Institute of Politics / Fall Semester 2018  
Study Group Meets Monday’s, 4:30-5:45 p.m., in the IOP Conference Room (L166)***

Study group led by **Joe Heck**, President - RedRock Government Relations; former Congressman and State Senator from Nevada; Chairman – National Commission on Military, National, and Public Service; Brigadier General – US Army Reserve.

Politics is frequently called the “art of compromise,” where those elected by a demographically diverse population meet to develop policies that all constituencies can accept. This requires a give and take in order to achieve a majority vote and accepting that no one gets everything they want in the final product. Economist Donald Wittman observed, “That is what good politicians do; create coalitions and find acceptable compromises.” Political philosopher Jean Bethke Elshtain wrote, “But compromise is not a mediocre way to do politics; it is an adventure, the *only* way to do democratic politics.”

Our entire government is based on compromise. At the Constitutional Convention of 1787, the Connecticut (or Great) Compromise defined the legislative structure and representation that each state would have. James Madison, the “Father of the Constitution,” introduced several ideas that he could not get through the Convention, but was instrumental in shifting the debate toward a compromise of “shared sovereignty” between the national and state governments.

But to what degree is the “art of compromise” demonstrated or embraced by elected officials today? In order to be viewed as successful back home, constituents want legislators to show meaningful results in Washington, DC – which requires compromise. Yet with a growing ideological divide and gerrymandered districts, voters often seek representatives that are “principled” or “uncompromising.” Thus, legislators face the difficult task of being an expert compromiser in chambers while appearing to voters to be an uncompromising champion of principle (Boudreaux and Lee, “Politics as the Art of Confined Compromise”).

Have our politicians become too partisan? Are they too focused on positioning themselves and their party for the next election to believe, as Otto von Bismarck said, “Politics is the art of the possible, the attainable — the art of the next best”? Is “The Art of the Deal” applicable to governing?

This study group will examine the factors that influence the perception, by both elected officials and the electorate, on bipartisanship, the role of compromise, and its impact on effective governing.

*NOTE: Weekly topics and speakers are subject to change, based on scheduling and availability.*

## **Week 1 - September 17. Bipartisanship and Compromise: “Milk and Honey” or “Oil and Water”?**

Over the course of almost two and a half centuries, our Nation, founded on compromise, has faced periods of both intense division and remarkable unity. During this introductory session, we will look at historical examples of each, briefly review the history of the two-party system, discuss partisanship / hyperpartisanship / bipartisanship, and explore examples of each in American history. This session will also provide an overview of the study group and highlight the topics and goals for the coming weeks' discussions. *No guest for this session.*

## **Week 2 - September 24. The Paradox of Partisanship: Essential for Politics Yet Potentially Toxic.**

Partisan conflict is a healthy and necessary aspect of democracy because one-party politics is not democracy: It's totalitarianism. Competition gives parties incentives to respond to voters; losing parties keep winning parties accountable; and parties mobilize and engage citizens to win elections, binding disparate citizens together in a common purpose. But with the good, comes the bad: To unite people, parties must also divide, by offering a common enemy to everyone on their side. Here's the paradox: We can't have democracy without partisanship. But when partisanship overwhelms everything, it becomes increasingly difficult for democracy to function. Join (via Skype) **Lee Drutman**, senior fellow in the political reform program at New America (confirmed) to discuss this political catch-22.

## **Week 3 - October 01. Stoking the Coals or Extinguishing the Flames: The Role of the Media.**

“Mainstream Media” “Alternative Media” “Fake News” Beyond the three traditional branches of government, there is another that has often been described as a fourth branch: the free press. Sir Edmund Burke reportedly said “there were three Estates ... but in the Reporters Gallery yonder, there sat a fourth Estate more important far than they all.” How does media reporting foster or hinder bipartisanship, compromise, and the process of governing? **Leigh Munsil**, editor of 'The Point with Chris Cillizza,' a multiplatform news and analysis section within CNN Politics (confirmed), offers her views on the press' responsibility to hold government accountable and the changing dynamics affecting journalism in today's 24-hour news cycle.

## **Week 4 - October 11. The 2018 Mid-Term Elections: What is on the Horizon? (NOTE: Thursday meeting day due to Columbus Day Holiday)**

With a spate of retirements, resignations, and runs for other offices, will the results of the mid-term elections lead to a 116<sup>th</sup> Congress that is more willing and capable of governing? Listen to **Chris Wilson**, CEO of WPA Intelligence (confirmed), as he provides an overview of the upcoming elections and engage in a discussion about the potential outcomes and what they might mean to the function/dysfunction of the 116<sup>th</sup> Congress.

### **Week 5 - October 15. What Does it Take to Govern: A view from the Right and Left?**

If Washington is good at anything, it is finger pointing! As the composition of Congress becomes increasingly polarized, what is it like to be a “radical centrist” – radical in that trying to govern through compromise is a foreign concept to many. Join **Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R-FL) (confirmed) and former **Rep. Dan Boren** (D-OK) (confirmed) for a discussion of their experiences as centrist lawmakers trying to find the middle ground in order to develop meaningful public policy.

### **Week 6 - October 22. Overcoming the Political Divide: Can Our Government Work Better?**

While a healthy, civil debate among those with differing viewpoints is an essential component of our democracy, the current partisan tone in government is impeding progress. Does increased transparency inhibit elected leaders from making the tough choices necessary to govern in the national interest, relegating decision making to the backrooms where things get done and where politicians can collaborate without reprisal? Join in a discussion with **Jason Grumet**, President of the Bipartisan Policy Center (confirmed), on the causes of gridlock: money, media and “mandering” – the latter of a “Gerry” nature, and how can we overcome political divides to make our government work better.

### **Week 7 - October 29. The Battle Within.**

Effective governing is not solely reliant on finding the middle ground between parties. Some of the most difficult battles are the internecine conflicts waged within the parties; between the House and Senate – even when controlled by the same party; or with the other branches of government. Former Republican House Majority Leader **Eric Cantor** (R-VA) (invited) will discuss his experiences while serving in this critical role.

### **Week 8 - November 05. Bipartisanship: Does the General Public Really Care?**

During this seminar we discussed the factors that influence bipartisanship and compromise, and their impact on the ability to govern. But the larger question is, “Does it really make a difference, does anybody really care?” There are currently two competing accounts of how citizens react to bipartisanship. Some scholars claim that citizens desire greater bipartisanship in Congress and punish legislators who are too partisan, while others argue that citizens punish same-party politicians for engaging in bipartisan cooperation. During this final session, we will explore the what, when and why citizens value bipartisanship. *No guest for this session.*