

**Let's Work Together:  
A Call for Bipartisanship in a Struggling Economy**

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## **Abstract**

The concept of bipartisanship is often discussed and debated in all areas of politics and policy. This study is a joint effort of one Democrat and one Republican with the common goal of appealing to government officials in Washington D.C. and across the nation to put aside political differences for the good of the nation and the economy. In such a time of poverty, unemployment, and overall economic instability, Democrats and Republicans need to find more common ground to help shorten unemployment lines, and lengthen the list of people who are thriving in America. Looking at historical bipartisan efforts and the current mood of the nation, this report presents a feasible plan for moving forward in order for the nation to continue to prosper. This is an important call to action.

## Introduction

Today, the word “bipartisanship” is thrown about in a majority of press covering the Republican controlled House or the Democratic-ruled Senate. The word “Bipartisanship” really means both parties working together; and regarding Congress, it *should* mean working together to improve America through responsible legislation that addresses pressing needs (e.g., unemployment, federal deficit, etc.). The word “Should” must not be confused with the word “Why” in this case. Democrats and Republicans must follow the same path pertaining to the latter. Why? Because they share the same goal, which is that they both “want” to make America a better place to live and work. Hence, the mindset in Washington has to change from “having” to do the job to “wanting” to do the job. Only then can meaningful changes take place regarding domestic and international policy issues.

In our early years, Americans are taught to work together: to be courteous, to share, and to compromise on the playground as well as in the classroom. However, by the time congressmen get into office, these values of cooperation seem to be all but forgotten, despite the fact that such elected officials are working on one of the most important stages in the world. Though it is struggling, the American economy is still a very powerful one, with an estimated GDP of approximately 14 trillion (USD) in 2011. The success of our lawmakers affects the lives of billions of people across the globe, so it is essential that all government workers have the ability and willingness to collaborate for the good of the country. There must be a call to action by which congressmen can put away finger-pointing and blame games in exchange for teamwork and genuine cooperation.

Surely we cannot all have the same viewpoints, but we *should* be able to find more common ground on issues such as job creation and improvement of the education system. It would be hard to find many people who truly believe that we do not need to create more jobs, and keep on par with schooling around the world, (especially in math and science); however, there seems to be very little agreement across party lines on these key issues. We need to focus on the real reasons behind unnecessary disagreements and work to combat them. The past few years have been very tough, and as we move further into 2012, there must be some drastic changes in our attitudes, if we are to progress any further.

## The Current Mood of America

Grunge looks notwithstanding, Occupy Wall Street (OWS) has a message that is simple and clear. They are dissatisfied with Congress and Big Business. With an unemployment rate that averaged around 9% for 2011, with between 13 between 15 million Americans unemployed, OWS is the lexicon for many people who are out of unemployment benefits, job prospects, and at their wits end. Thousands have been arrested and many headlines have hit the press, but the bottom line is that many Americans are very unhappy with the current state of affairs. It is easy to critique OWS for the lack anything that resembles a coherent business plan or the like, but they do a fair job in articulating the mood of the nation. Not in a way pertaining specifically to Democrats or Republicans, but to the nation as a whole. The recession has hit everyone very hard, regardless of party affiliation. Many middle class Republicans and Democrats have joined

the ranks of the poor and unemployed. There is genuine concern for permanent job loss to the economy. The OWS group's basis for existence seems to be predicated on their dissatisfaction with the leaders of the public and private sectors. Regarding their effort, freedom of speech is a constitutional right, but violence and, or breaking the law is not. In a nutshell, millions of Americans across the country want change because of recent actions, and in-actions of the members of both Congress and the private sector.

## **Public Sector Behavior**

Make no mistake, voters in upcoming elections may think twice about selecting candidates as a result of the debt ceiling mayhem that took place throughout the past year. Incendiary remarks made by the press aimed at House & Senate members, and President Barack Obama only added to the unfortunate and combustible environment.

To gain a better overall understanding of the current pulse of the country, an important question must be addressed: How is Congress's behavior affecting the overall mood of the nation? There are two possible motives regarding behavior during the debt ceiling discussions. First, laying the groundwork for responsible spending habits over the near-term and long-term, so America has a better foundation upon which to build. Second, make each and every action predicated on winning the White House in 2012.

In reality, both motives are being followed, and we as Americans can only hope that more emphasis is put on the first than the second by our current crop of elected officials. There is nothing wrong with the House & Senate hashing out valid ideas and concepts. Let us hope, however, that our elected officials put the needs of America's economic stability first and political aspirations second. Regarding the current political landscape, the recent legislation relating to the payroll tax cut and unemployment extension further exemplified a Congress that seems to be more combative than cooperative, which gives the press and groups like OWS more to latch on to.

While the current elected officials have done a decent job navigating America through the worst recession since the Great Depression, more has to be done in creating an environment that focuses on convergence than divergence.

## **Bipartisanship History Lessons**

Our call for the leaders of our country to band together for common goals is surely not unprecedented. America has faced numerous crises and dynamic changes including World Wars, economic collapses, civil rights movements, population shifts and influxes of immigration. Each of these historical events caused lawmakers to put aside their differences to ensure that the country continued to prosper.

Democratic President Harry S. Truman, whose administration held the nation together during the aftermath of World War II, built a strong bi-partisan relationship with Republican Senator Arthur

Vandenberg. Together they helped to pass policies that ultimately led to the formation of the Marshall Plan and NATO, benefiting not only the U.S., but many nations.

Another example of effective bipartisanship was Republican President Abraham Lincoln, who stated that he was willing to do anything to save the nation, notably put aside his political beliefs to appoint a Democrat, Edwin Stanton as his Secretary of War. Stanton worked closely with Lincoln throughout the Civil War, and was influenced greatly by the President. Political ideologies aside, the two were able to work toward common goals during a difficult time. After Lincoln's assassination, Stanton became a Republican, and remained influential during the rest of his term.

It would be an outright lie to suggest that partisanship has not ruled our two-party system for most of its history. If we all had the same view points and could work easily with one another, there would be no need for political distinctions. The two-party system has served our nation well. But the efforts of both parties working hand in hand to resolve this complex problem are essential.

In the past, policies such as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the No Child Left Behind Act were supported by Congress members of both parties at very high rates. In both instances, politicians helped the nation to realize a common goal. And, in the case of the No Child Left Behind Act, members of both parties actively collaborated to formulate the policy. The bill was drawn up by two Representatives: John Boehner (R-OH) and George Miller (D-CA), and two Senators: Edward Kennedy (D-MA) and Judd Gregg (R-NH). The four were able to work together to create legislation that was supported by both parties. Why can't we find a way to do this more often?

## **Voting Along Party Lines**

Americans usually vote along party lines, and today we are following the same pattern. Our current economic landscape has some real issues that include a 1.3 trillion dollar Federal Deficit and a high national unemployment rate. To make matters worse, it seems that Democrats & Republicans are being a bit stubborn, and immobile in their ways. The tagline is not about being a Republican or Democrat, but an American--- maybe a little old fashioned or idealistic, but we could use a change right now regarding bipartisanship efforts such federal spending and job creation.

In a nutshell, the Republicans control the House, and the Democrats control the Senate. After the November 2010 Elections it was great to see the Democrats & Republicans work together to pass key legislation such as the reduction of payroll taxes to spur job growth. However, since then, it has been one mudslinging match after another. The Democrats want to spend more to create jobs and the Republicans want to cut-spending to reduce the Federal Deficit. Both objectives have merit. However, each party has placed a "Stake-In-The-Sand" and will not budge. Hence, the political stalemate that we are currently in. What is necessary is an approach that will maintain fiscal responsibility that creates jobs to stimulate the economy and get America working again.

## **Possible Areas of Bipartisan Efforts**

America has currently between 13-15 million unemployed, so it will come as no surprise that job creation is priority one on Washington's wish list. In reality, a Workers Progress Administration/Workers Projects Administration (WPA) - type of program could be used to hire millions of Americans to help rebuild our airports, bridges, tunnels, and roadways. However, efforts like the Golden Gate Bridge and Hoover Dam are just "Pie in the Sky" at the moment because of too much debt at the Federal, state, and local levels. However, a new Federal program, which entices the private sector to invest via tax credits, and or other incentives, could help to create jobs, while simultaneously help rebuild depressed areas of the country.

For example, large-scale community rehabilitation projects could help spur job growth and help to lower overall the national unemployment rate. It is therefore logical to assume that if a person is legally and gainfully employed, then they can contribute to the local economy, which ultimately contributes to national economy. Hence, a primary focus for Washington should be on how to create well paying jobs that will help to establish long-term stability of the nation. Places like South Los Angeles and Flint, Michigan are in dire need of rehabilitation. This means Washington is in a position to not only create jobs, but to improve the lives of people and the overall health of depressed areas.

Please Note: We are talking about a national redevelopment program that is managed at the Federal level, rather than state run redevelopment-type efforts. An example of a successful state to Federal transition is the story of Yosemite. The park was created by Yosemite Grant of 1864 by a bill passed by the 38<sup>th</sup> Congress and signed into law by President Abraham Lincoln. While under state rule the park was being pillaged by entrepreneurs whose prime focus was exploiting the park's beauty for monetary purposes. This debauchery did not go unnoticed. John Muir, an avid park supporter convinced President Theodore Roosevelt to protect the park under national jurisdiction, and in 1906 a bill was passed that put the park under Federal control. Later on control of the Yosemite was transferred to National Park Service (Created in 1916), and today it stands a not only as a national treasure, but proof of Washington's ability to work in a bipartisan manner on at least two occasions to pass laws that would benefit America for future generations. Large-scale redevelopment efforts should not be run at the state level because it is almost like re-inventing the wheel at each instance. Hence, a Federal model should be used that puts standards in place and leverages resources across each project to maximize efficiency, which will lead to quicker results and lower costs.

How do we get businesses to invest into a depressed area on a massive scale? It is simple to say, but much harder to follow-through. You can either entice businesses via tax-credits, and or related tax perks. This can only happen by close cooperation between the public and private sectors in slow manageable steps, which is part of a bigger long-term plan. It must make sense from a profit and loss point of view, as well as a humanitarian point of view. Both are interrelated and not mutually exclusive. For these reasons, Democrats & Republicans in Washington will have to craft new laws, with corporate incentives, making it compelling for the private sector to invest into the program.

With 2 trillion in cash, corporations hold the cards. Accordingly, if Washington wants to lure business on a large-scale into depressed areas like South Los Angeles or Flint, then they will have to make some very innovative and important changes to the current tax laws. State and local authorities will also want to be part of the process to help their constituents. This type of far-reaching and large-scale effort will no doubt require members of the House and Senate to work closely together, but the results could help in creating jobs, while helping to rejuvenate depressed areas. It could also set a precedent and foundation for the rebuilding of America in 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## **The Future of Bipartisanship**

Perhaps referring to the need for bipartisanship in Washington, Arthur Vandenberg once stated: “Politics stops at the water’s edge.” Politicians of today and tomorrow must take this type of mindset to heart. If one Republican and one Democrat can come together to assemble this call to action for members of all political parties to work together toward common goals, then our elected officials can surely put aside their differences for the good of the nation. American history has shown us that we can surely lay to rest our political ambitions, if only for a short while, in order to enact new policies that allow us to thrive as a nation. Please Note: The current political gridlock is hampering America’s ability to move into the growth mode over the short-term, while also jeopardizing its position as the global leader over the long-term.

In the future, we must go beyond what we have accomplished in the past. We should look back and see only a glimmer of the things we are proud of today. As much as we have progressed in civil rights over the past century, we should be progressing in other areas as well. The fact is that America has never faced a tougher time. The potential loss of power and influence in the world is a real possibility. Because of our overspending in both the public and private sectors, things may get worse before they become better. Thus, now more than ever we need our leaders to put their heads together, and work harder than even our most effective congress members of the past. It is time for individuals in all government entities at the Federal, state and local levels to understand their call to public service: to work together regardless of political beliefs, or other relatively petty differences, for the betterment of our society. We must focus our attention on *why* bipartisan efforts are not an everyday reality, and work to make them such.

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