



February 5, 2021

An Open Letter to Congressional Leadership from the Bipartisan ReFormers Caucus

The assault on the U.S. Capitol by violent insurgents underscored what has long been true; American democracy can be fragile and, at times, vulnerable. It is vulnerable to misinformation campaigns and lies about the integrity of our elections. It is weakened by political violence of all kinds and by elected officials who fan the flames of division, undermining our sacred democratic institutions and eroding public trust. It is susceptible to cyber attacks from foreign powers and diminished abroad when our government is viewed as dysfunctional and divided.

All of these weaknesses have been exacerbated by a global pandemic, economic devastation for many American families, and a long overdue reckoning on systemic racism. At this inflection point in our nation's history — facing multiple crises and toxic hyper-partisanship — the role of the legislative branch is more important than ever. Congress must seek common ground, fulfill its constitutional role and lead.

We, members of Issue One's ReFormers Caucus, strongly urge you to reject the unproven conspiracies that undermined trust in the 2020 elections and led to the violent attack on the U.S. Capitol on January 6th and the death of five Americans.

We also implore you to leave behind the extreme polarization that has plagued American politics and embrace the common ground. We understand how difficult this can be. The ReFormers Caucus is made up of more than 200 former members of Congress, governors, and Cabinet officials, and is the largest bipartisan coalition of its kind ever assembled. We know what it's like to serve and govern, raise money, make family sacrifices, and engage with constituents. We also recognize the weight that comes with being a leader of your political party and the immense pressures of winning re-election.

We know how easy it has become to lapse into a mindset in which members of the opposing party are seen as enemies, rather than potential partners who have different views but hold a shared commitment to America and solving problems. The incentives that drive division in our politics are stronger than ever. The unchecked rise of social media has invited disinformation and created political echo chambers, while partisan redistricting and record spending in campaigns are alienating many voters. This cycle has to end. Treating one another as adversaries, and not fellow citizens, eliminates the possibility that Congress will work together to identify and act on areas of common ground for the common good. This urgently requires strong and bold leadership.

Restoring honorable norms, mutual respect and common civility in the Capitol is essential. It could also lead to opportunities to work across party lines on legislation to help our fellow citizens. Embracing the possibility of bipartisanship must begin with Congressional leadership. We call on Senate Leaders McConnell and Schumer, Speaker Pelosi, and Leader McCarthy to act not only as leaders of your respective parties, but as leaders of this entire country. We will encourage the same type of responsibility for groups like the Tea Party Caucus, the New Democrats Coalition, the Progressive Caucus and the Problem Solvers Caucus. These leaders must put country before party by truly respecting, listening to, and learning from their colleagues across the aisle.



This moment in our nation’s history presents both an opportunity and a duty for Congress to chart a better path forward. As President Lincoln challenged us in his Second Inaugural address, “Let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds.” Democracy is always a work in progress, and you as our elected leaders should strive to advance the ideals of our founders to create a more perfect union. America is counting on you to lead.

Sincerely,

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Rep. Gresham Barrett (R-SC)
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Sen. Jeff Bingaman (D-NM)
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