

THE FIRST AMENDMENT

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

A Labor Day challenge to congressional candidates Valadao and Villegas

A bipartisan approach that guarantees a vote on our most pressing issues

Labor Day traditionally marks the final stretch of an election campaign. Voters in California's 22nd Congressional District will spend the next two months hearing Republican David Valadao and Democrat Randy Villegas explain where they stand on immigration, Social Security, healthcare, federal spending and other major issues.

Those positions matter. But there is another question voters should ask both candidates: Even if we elect you, how are you going to get anything done?

For decades, candidates from both parties have gone to Washington promising solutions to major national problems. Yet many remain unresolved from one Congress to the next.

The problem isn't simply that Republicans and Democrats disagree. Disagreement is part of democracy. The deeper problem is that Congress lacks an effective mechanism for requiring the parties to work together on our most intractable problems — and then vote on the results.

At Fulfilling America's Promise, the nonpartisan organization behind the Make Congress Work Again initiative, we offer a fresh approach.

Our proposed Bipartisan Priority Reform Commission Act identifies seven long-standing problems, including immigration reform, Social Security funding, healthcare policy, structural budget imbalances and federal election reform.

Congress would select only one or two issues during a two-year Congress. For each, a 16-member bipartisan commission — eight members from Congress equally divided between the parties and eight outside experts appointed on a bipartisan basis — would hold public hearings and attempt to develop legislation. Commission approval would require support from legislative members of both

parties.

Every member of Congress could propose amendments, and the commission would have to explain in writing why any amendment was rejected.

Before receiving expedited treatment, the legislation would face another hurdle: bipartisan sponsorship in both the House and Senate. Only then would procedural roadblocks preventing a final decision be removed. Congress would debate the proposal and vote, including under a narrow exception to the Senate filibuster rule.

Our proposal does not abolish the filibuster. It would continue to apply to other legislation. Today, the test for cloture is principally numerical: normally, 60 senators can invoke cloture regardless of how they are divided between the parties.

The approach imposes a different safeguard. Before the filibuster exception applies, legislation must demonstrate support from both parties at multiple stages. It could pass the Senate with fewer than 60 votes, but only with solid bipartisan support. It changes the math but not the necessity of bipartisanship. The principle is simple: protect the minority while a solution is being developed, but don't permit a minority to block a final vote after meaningful bipartisan support has been achieved. The act also would expire after two years unless renewed.

Does the public want something different? We commissioned a national survey of 1,133 registered independent voters. Eighty-seven percent said Washington is too polarized to operate effectively. Approximately 81% agreed bipartisan cooperation produces more effective outcomes. More than 76% supported bipartisan commissions to address major national issues, and approximately 79% supported requiring bipartisan cooperation.

Then we tried a different test. For 45 days this summer, Fulfilling America's Promise conducted a Facebook and Instagram campaign asking Americans to endorse our approach. More than 1,400 people endorsed the proposal, providing their names, email addresses and ZIP codes, at an average advertising cost of approximately \$1.50 per endorsement. That wasn't another opinion poll. People affirmatively put their names behind the idea.

Americans may disagree about immigration, Social Security or federal spending. But they may nevertheless agree that Congress needs a better way of finding solutions.

The candidates should tell voters whether they would support trying a new approach — one that demands bipartisan cooperation, cuts through congressional gridlock and guarantees a vote when meaningful bipartisan support has been achieved.

A Democrat can advocate Democratic solutions. A Republican can advocate Republican solutions. But both should answer a simple question: When Congress has repeatedly failed to solve a major national problem, should we try a limited process requiring the parties to work together — and, if they succeed, requiring Congress to vote?

Imagine the message California's 22nd District could send to Washington if the candidates agreed on at least that much.

Whoever wins would arrive in Washington having heard a clear message from California: Congress was elected to solve problems. It should be required to vote on them.

This Labor Day, voters should ask the candidates whether they agree.

Jerry Madden is president of Fulfilling America's Promise, a nonpartisan civic initiative sponsoring the Make Congress Work Again campaign at <https://makecongressworkagain.org>.



JERRY MADDEN

Democrats take a pragmatic step toward winning the White House

After years of consideration, the Democratic National Committee decided at its summer meeting last month that South Carolina would hold the party's first presidential primary in 2028. The decision upends the traditional calendar that kicked things off in Iowa and New Hampshire, opting instead for a Deep South state with a reputation for plucking presidents from an army of hopefuls.

Recent history tells the tale. In 1982, Bill Clinton dubbed himself the "comeback kid" after a series of scandals and a primary loss, but it was wins in Georgia and South Carolina that saved his campaign and justified the nickname. In 2008, despite early losses and polls showing him behind Hillary

Clinton in South Carolina, Barack Obama's decisive victory there paved his path to the nomination and the presidency. And in 2016, when Jeb Bush and Joe Biden brought a losing streak to the state, but he left it leading the pack and carried that momentum into Tuesday and the White House.

As it happens, when the winner of a crowded South Carolina Democratic primary also wins the party nomination, they become president. Now, the party is hoping to front-load that magic. "This is about our approach to winning back the presidency," DNC Chair Ken Martin said at the recent meeting. "It's about the kind of Democratic Party and the kind of country we want."

Democrats are engaged in a tug-of-war between progressives pulling the party left and a more moderate wing attempting to hold the center. By going to South Carolina first, the party is declaring that pragmatism is its electoral and governing philosophy.

The most obvious difference between starting in South Carolina on Jan. 22, 2028, rather than Iowa and New Hampshire, is the state's diversity. In 2020, Black voters made up 56 percent of the Democratic primary electorate in South Carolina, but the state is two-thirds white and solidly Republican. That gives its politics a distinctive culture, one in which a nominee's viability matters most. Politicians in Iowa and New Hampshire have long cited their states' skill at vetting candi-



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