



We asked Bernie Sanders to debate Lindsey Graham. Who will win? America.

A conservative media outlet conducting a debate in the building named after the liberal 'Lion of the Senate' is symbolic of our goal.

By Bruce A. Percelay, Matt Sandgren, and Jason Grumet | Monday, June 13, 2022

Our nation is falling into a partisan death spiral.

Negative polarization has ramped up to such a degree that in the lead-up to the 2020 presidential election, 9 out of 10 Americans said victory by the opposing party would do "lasting harm" to the country. And a study this year from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace found that the United States is the most deeply polarized of the world's established democracies.

Accelerating this trend is a social media ecosystem that sorts voters into echo chambers that magnify outrage, misinformation and confirmation bias. The result is the fractured public discourse we see today.

Republicans and Democrats have largely stopped talking to each other – and even when they try, they inevitably talk past each other.

Break down siloes that keep us living in separate realities

We need to put a stop to this vicious cycle. We need to restore sane, genuine political discussion between the two parties. And we need to break down the information siloes that keep Americans living in separate realities.

But how?

We can start by looking to models of constructive policymaking from the past.



In the modern era, there was no better example of a successful “odd couple” dynamic in politics than the friendship between Sens. Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts and Orrin Hatch of Utah. Both in terms of temperament and political beliefs, the two men were polar opposites: Kennedy was a die-hard Democrat from New England; Hatch was a red-meat Republican from the Mountain West.

Kennedy, from a family of wealth, devoted his service to the needs of the underprivileged; Hatch, a teetotaling Latter-day Saint, was reared in a refurbished chicken coop.

Despite their manifold differences, Kennedy and Hatch became best friends in the Senate. They could argue vociferously on the Senate floor over competing legislation. But then reporters would find them laughing together over dinner that same evening.

And as strange bedfellows, they would rise to prominence in their respective parties, passing some of the most consequential reforms of the past century. This includes the Americans with Disabilities Act, Medicare Part D, the Emergency Medical Services for Children Act, and the Comprehensive AIDS Resources Emergency Act.

The secret to their success was not some lukewarm brand of go-along-to-get-along politics. To the contrary, both men were known for being stubborn and steadfastly loyal to their respective parties. But that’s the key: It was the reputation of both Hatch and Kennedy as dedicated partisans that granted immediate credibility to the bipartisan work they did together.

As Hatch said in 2009 after Kennedy passed away at the age of 77, “When we did agree, everyone turned to get out of the way. They thought if Kennedy and Hatch can get it together, (the legislation) must be good.” Hatch died this April at 88.

Hatch, Kennedy learned to work together

The Hatch-Kennedy model turns conventional wisdom on its head. In reality, it’s not the most moderate members but rather committed partisans who can make the most effective dealmakers.

Consider some of the most influential members of Congress to ever serve: Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, Thaddeus Stevens, Lyndon B. Johnson, Everett Dirksen and Robert Byrd. None of these men

were known for being milquetoast moderates. They were all, to varying degrees, exceptionally partisan.

And they were all instrumental in leading some of the most significant bipartisan reforms in American history. This insight – that partisanship can, in fact, help spur legislative leadership – still holds true in the modern era.

The Hatch-Kennedy model of policymaking provides an essential lesson for today's officeholders: Republicans and Democrats don't need to leave their political beliefs at the door to reach historic compromises. Rather, they can, and should, bring their partisanship with them. But they also need to recognize that the greater good can be found in compromise, and that insisting on winning everything will ultimately result in failure.

This is the animating ethos behind The Senate Project – a groundbreaking debate series launched by the Edward M. Kennedy Institute, the Orrin G. Hatch Foundation and the Bipartisan Policy Center. Collectively, our organizations are committed to restoring the culture of compromise and constructive debate that once characterized “the world's greatest deliberative body.”

Drawing inspiration from the example of Sen. Hatch and Sen. Kennedy, we are convening prominent partisans from both sides of the aisle to engage each other in a series of 60-minute Oxford-style debates to be aired on national television. Our audacious goal is to resurrect the spirit of Hatch and Kennedy to help heal the Senate.

Fox Nation will host the debate

The Senate Project will debut at noon EDT Monday with a debate between Sens. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., moderated by veteran Fox News correspondent Bret Baier. The debate, at the Edward M. Kennedy Institute's life-size replica of the U.S. Senate in Boston, will be streamed on Fox Nation.

A conservative media outlet conducting a debate in the building named after the liberal “Lion of the Senate” is symbolic of our goal to bring opposing sides together. Subsequent debates between leading Democrats and Republicans will be held this year on other national news outlets in an effort to reach both red and blue America.

In contrast to the quadrennial presidential debates, the driving purpose of The Senate Project is to encourage dialogue and explore areas of common ground between the two parties. That's why each debate will begin with senators defending their positions on a specific policy issue. But each debate will end with questions designed to help senators explore areas of potential bipartisan agreement.

If Sens. Kennedy and Hatch were alive today, they would hardly recognize the Senate in which they served. This once august body has been bogged down by the extreme partisanship that has grabbed hold of the rest of the country. But The Senate Project seeks to change that.

Through the Hatch-Kennedy model, we hope to resurrect the great debates that have all but disappeared from today's Senate. We hope to forge compromise and commonsense solutions. And we hope to show Americans that bipartisanship and vigorous debate can coexist – and that civility is still possible, even in today's hyperpolarized world.

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