

THE 'UN-DIRTYING DOZEN'

(A 'Baker's Dozen' Solutions for Cleaning Up Washington)

Can we conceive of both parties working together enough that so much good legislation got passed, challengers to both parties' incumbents would hardly stand a chance?

Introduction.

Since many people believe 'all's fair in love and war,' political parties now view politics as war—not just competition—so much bad behavior is allowed. In this the greatest, most innovative country in the world, can we find no solutions to the partisanship and less-than-satisfactory results coming from our federal government. Let's consider the following possibilities, and you can add your own suggestions on our website, www.AmericanAnswers.org. [**Please note:** These are not in priority order, the quickest workable solution being number one].

1. Principled Politician's Pledge.

Our best chance to bring more immediate change in Washington and let our voices to be heard in *specific* ways is for voters to sign our Petition for Principled Politics (below) It seeks to make both the Principled Politician's Pledge and Politicians' Profile required public disclosures of all political candidates, and would put candidates on notice that we are serious about them changing their divisive tricks and policies.

Voters need to recruit (and vote for) Congressional candidates who are more committed to common sense solutions and the principles of that Pledge than they are their own party. And elected politicians should only vote-in Republican and Democrat leadership that will encourage and support candidates voting their conscience, independent of undue party pressure. I hope you will sign this Petition (and tell someone else about it) before you are finished reading this book.

Short of this, at least identify individual Congressmen whose track record shows them to be either:

- 1) Compromisers for good policies,
- 2) Compromisers for bad policies, or
- 3) Intransigent, and won't ever compromise,
and vote only for the first category.

2. Politicians' Profile.

Political candidates should be *required* to address the Politicians' Profile (**See:** Politicians' Profile, in the Appendix) with yes, no or nuanced answers available for explanation, while being free to not answer at all—that *non*-response being made public for the voters to take note of. Voters could then have short-sheet position statements (or matrixes) to quickly familiarize themselves with candidates' views—especially where they differ from traditional party line—posted on candidates' websites, or a more central location.

3. 'Electronic Town Hall.'

We could consider letting the voters vote their opinions on *specific* legislation online (Ex.: Ross Perot's electronic town hall idea). This would be more interactive than just public opinion polls. Voters need mechanisms to express their thoughts and have their suggestions taken more seriously—rather than one vote spun as support for all a party stands for. It might also include an electronic suggestion box (like BP used in the Gulf oil spill), as we have on our website. (**See:** AmericanAnswers.org's Blog for adding your own suggestions for how government could do things better, faster, cheaper and in a more 'balanced' way. The best suggestions will be placed in an expected follow-on political book about issues solutions needing to be *implemented*).

4. Voters Vote on Legislation (Non-Binding).

As your ninth grader will tell you, we live in a representative Democracy, so the citizens don't directly make the laws, but citizen leaders representing our interests. It would not be illegal, however, to have non-binding referendum ballot initiatives to let voters vote on various legislation under consideration, as a quite formal way of expressing their views, with even more interaction and involvement from number 3, above, or public opinion polls. Especially on a state level, it would then be harder for a Congressional candidate to claim he or she was 'doing the will of his constituents,' if the numbers were not in his favor.

5. Ballot Box Initiatives.

Election ballots could have a box for protesting 'all of the above' candidates, even if voters vote for the least offensive candidate thereafter. Not voting at all does not send a clear message to let the parties know how strongly people oppose their extremism—they're just ignored. Voting ballots might need to allow voters to select *why* they're voting for certain measures, and include a box supporting our leaders following the principles of the Politician's Pledge. Or, ballots should allow voters to vote for candidates (or straight party) and identify by check box (or fill in the blank) specific issues that party represents that they oppose.

6. Taxes Check Boxes.

We could consider having a check box (or boxes) on the 1040 tax form for people who don't want their money supporting a limited number of unconscionable measures (Ex.: pork barrel projects, federally-funded abortions, etc.). This would not simplify the tax code, but might improve it.

7. Anonymous Votes?

A weaker alternative would be anonymous Congressional votes (electronically recorded to later verify one's voting record, unavailable to party leadership) which might encourage more across-the-aisle interaction, not in pursuit of Kumbaya hand-holding or agreeing on everything, but to re-establish competition, sportsmanship, decency, civility and class (as John McCain has reflectively reminisced about), instead of outright warfare.

8. People's Lobbyists.

We need professional (or skilled amateur) lobbyists for the common man. Politicians are supposed to be our lobbyists for legislation, but when they overly-squabble and self-serve, *we* need a referee and someone there to represent *our* viewpoints.

There also needs to be severe monitoring of all events between lobbyist donors and candidates and elected officials, and full disclosure of agenda items, amounts given, and legislation impacting such donors.

9. Political Mediators/Arbiters.

There could be a publicly- (or privately) supported watchdog group, with publicity and clout, to specifically hold Congress' feet to the fire on both sides of the aisle toward sound and rational decision-making and policies. Such groups exist already, but too few voters use or even know about them, so Congress gets away with ignoring their advice.

At the same time, each citizen themselves need to be a watchdog and whistleblower on issues, the budget, legislation and lobbyists (to the extent that information is made available to them). Perhaps daily emails or tweeted bullet points of good and bad actions taken (and legislative voting by their representatives) could be provided to them, for public servant accountability to their constituents.

An independent group (or select politicians) could serve as mediators when Congress experiences gridlock, obstructionist tactics or severe divisiveness, without denying any members' use of existing rules of order, such as the filibuster.

10. Parties' Self-Reformation.

"Our people look for a cause to believe in. Is it a third party we need, or is it a new and revitalized second party, raising a banner of no pastels, but bold colors, which make it unmistakably clear where we stand on all of the issues troubling the people?" —**Ronald Reagan**

Unfortunately, my hero's words have now been used to support promotion of extremism, where distinctions between parties are now only *polar opposite* positions. Times have changed enough from those days that revitalizing both parties toward common sense policies that don't mirror their opponent may be impossible.

11. Congressional Internal Affairs?

This suggestion came from a contact of mine while researching this book. It would not be a 'Star Chamber-'like group, but analogous to the police's Internal Affairs department.

Government at all levels needs enhanced ethics laws that politicians will take seriously (including banning some tricks listed in our Archives, www.AmericanAnswers.org). The Congressional Ethics Committee (or an independent body) might need to have the power to significantly punish violators, and those who encourage political warfare (including party leaders) should face some penalties for so doing.

12. Third Party?

Someone has said, 'saying we should keep the two-party system simply because it is working is like saying the *Titanic* voyage was a success because a few people survived on life rafts.'

Despite what both parties tell you, the influence of a centrist, mainstream majority third party could be a viable long-term option, as an arbiter of the people and brokering power between the two parties. The Constitution does not require a two-party system, and some define 'insanity' as continuing to do the same thing, hoping for better results. Just realize the 'it will never happen' excuse is used by parties who don't want it to, or are scared that it might (and the Tea Party shows how quickly something like this could happen!). This book has never advocated for such, but the concept is not untenable or unreasonable.

13. Lawsuits (Class Action).

Lastly, citizens could consider filing class action law suits against any politicians or parties violating the law, their oath of office, or specific ethics laws having the force of law. Presidents often use the 'bully pulpit' power, threatening things perhaps not yet legal to do, and the people in Washington could use some of that from we the people even if such a lawsuit could not be sustained (which is why it is listed last).