

# Reuniting *Our States*

Building Bridges Where We Live

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**MIDWEST LEGISLATIVE CONFERENCE**

Council of State Governments

Columbus, Ohio

July 22, 2024

## Why

**Why reach across to the "other side"** and potentially alienate your colleagues or party leader? What are the incentives? What are the risks?

## Where

**Where does it make sense to go cross-partisan?** With a strong Blue or Red majority? Or in a more evenly divided chamber? What makes the best odds for success?

## When

**Should one try to cross the aisle before an election?** Right after an election? As far away from Election Day as possible? Or should electoral politics be disregarded entirely? When should partisanship matter?

## What

**What issues are worth the effort** of building cross-partisan coalitions? Hot divisive controversial issues? Or low-hanging fruit where there is already covert consensus? Which issues will be most likely to succeed— and what is "success"?

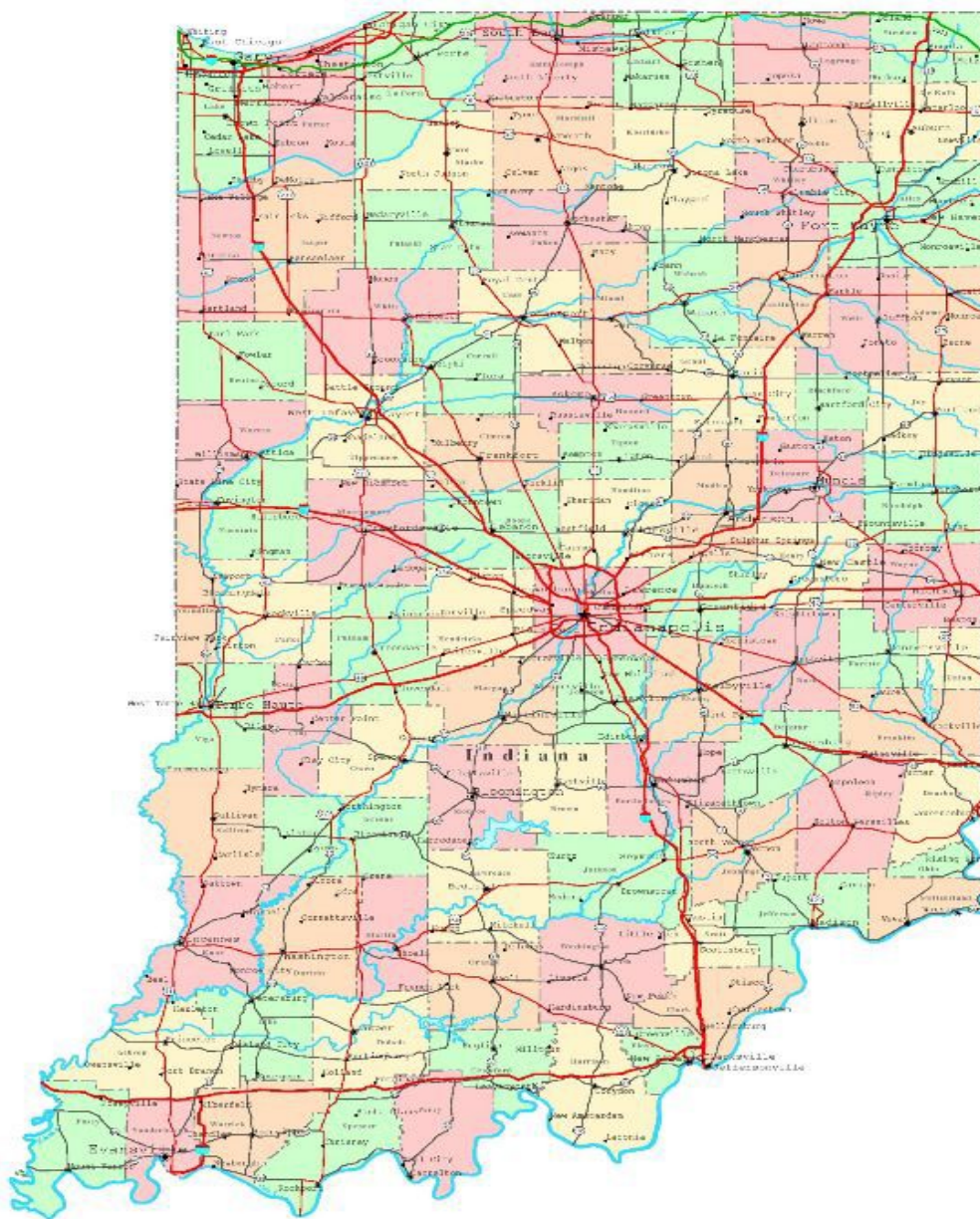
## How

**How has crossing the aisle worked best in the past?** Does how it was done in the past apply to today's hyperpartisan politics? In a polarized legislature, how does one even start? How does one design a process that works?

# Overview

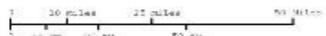
- In times of division and polarization, public service can often become divisive and overwhelming. In this workshop, each participant will be invited to:
  - Reflect on **your purpose in public service**
  - Strengthen your skills in bridging differences
  - Assess the opportunities and obstacles to bridging

What is your question today?



## Indiana

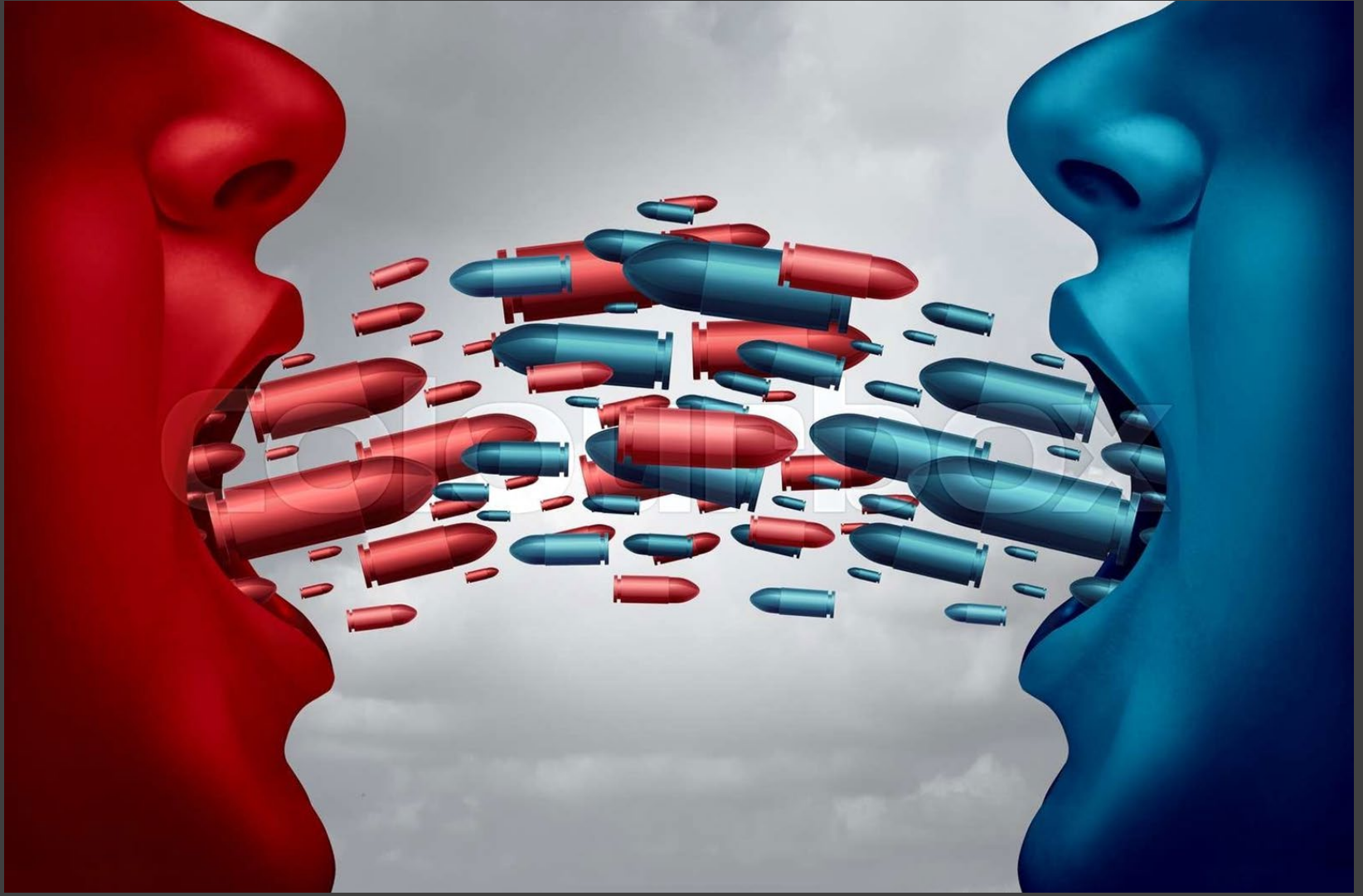
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>★ State Capitals</li> <li>● County Seat</li> <li>● Cities 500,000+</li> <li>● Cities 100,000-499,999</li> <li>● Cities 50,000-99,999</li> <li>● Cities 10,000-49,999</li> <li>● Cities 2-9,999</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--- State Boundaries</li> <li>--- County Boundaries</li> <li>--- Full Roads and Highways</li> <li>--- Interstate Highways</li> <li>--- U.S. Highways</li> <li>--- State Roads</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>--- Major Rivers</li> <li>--- Intermediate Rivers</li> <li>● Lakes</li> </ul> |
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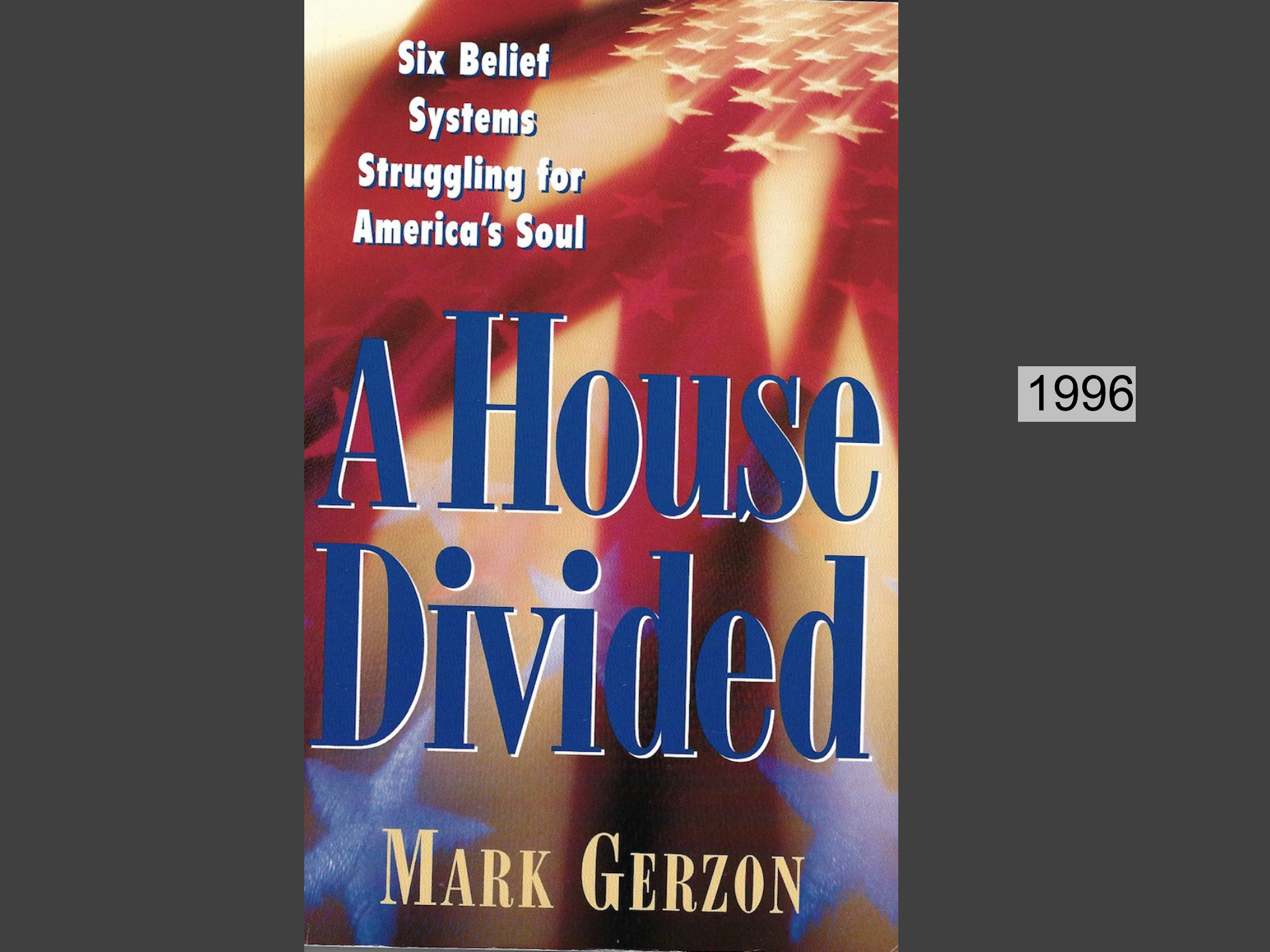


**LIBERAL**

**CONSERVATIVE**







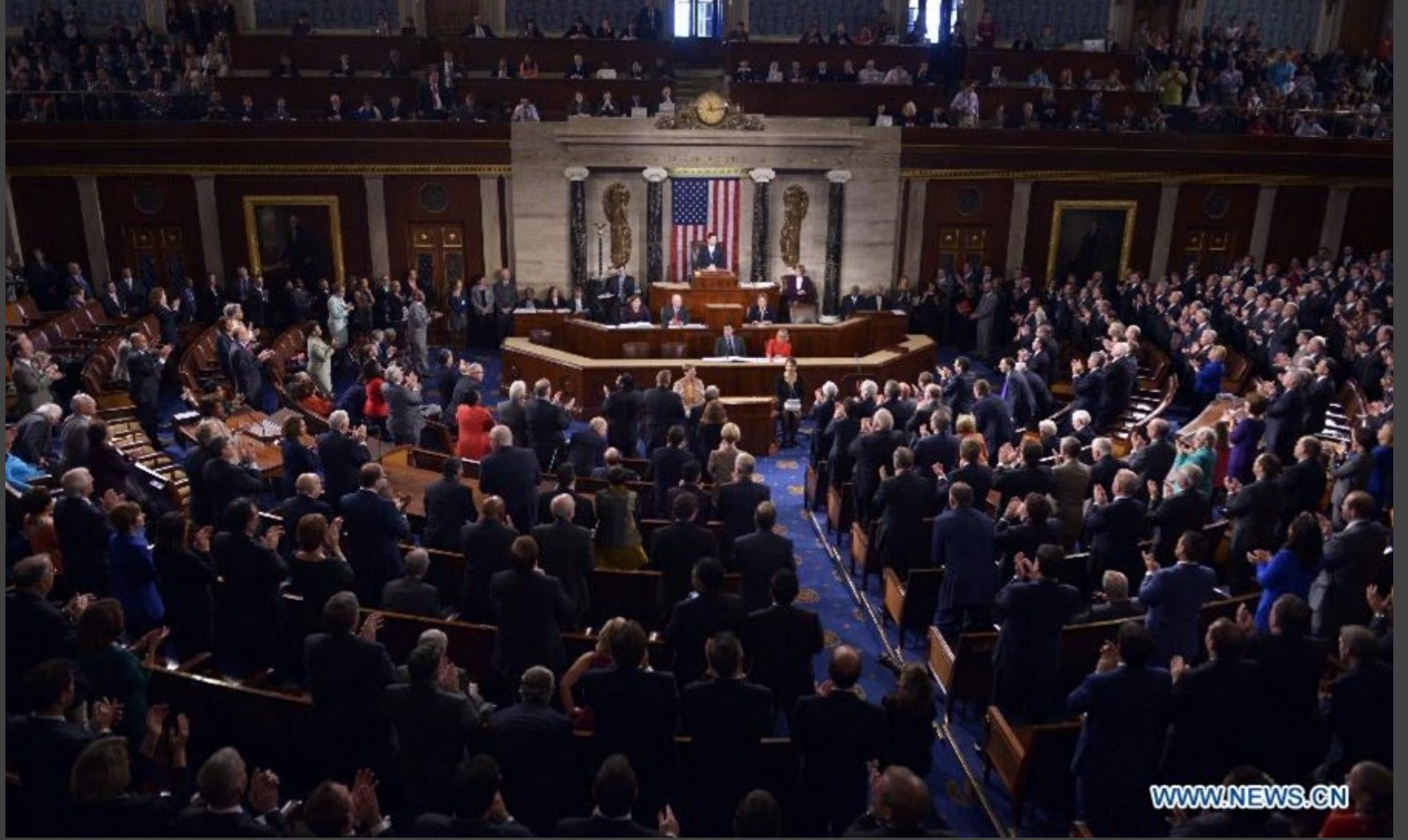
**Six Belief  
Systems  
Struggling for  
America's Soul**

# **A House Divided**

**MARK GERZON**

1996





[WWW.NEWS.CN](http://WWW.NEWS.CN)

## **Bipartisan Congressional Retreat Ground Rules**

Objective: "To create a safe environment for open conversation."

### **RESPECT**

"To show for; avoid violation of; treat with deference."  
No personal attacks.

### **FAIRNESS**

Equal time for speakers.  
Speak briefly, time is limited.

### **LISTENING**

When others speak, listen—don't prepare your remarks.  
Listen with intent to understand.

### **OPENNESS**

To other points of view.  
To outcome.  
To each person regardless of seniority.

### **PRIVACY**

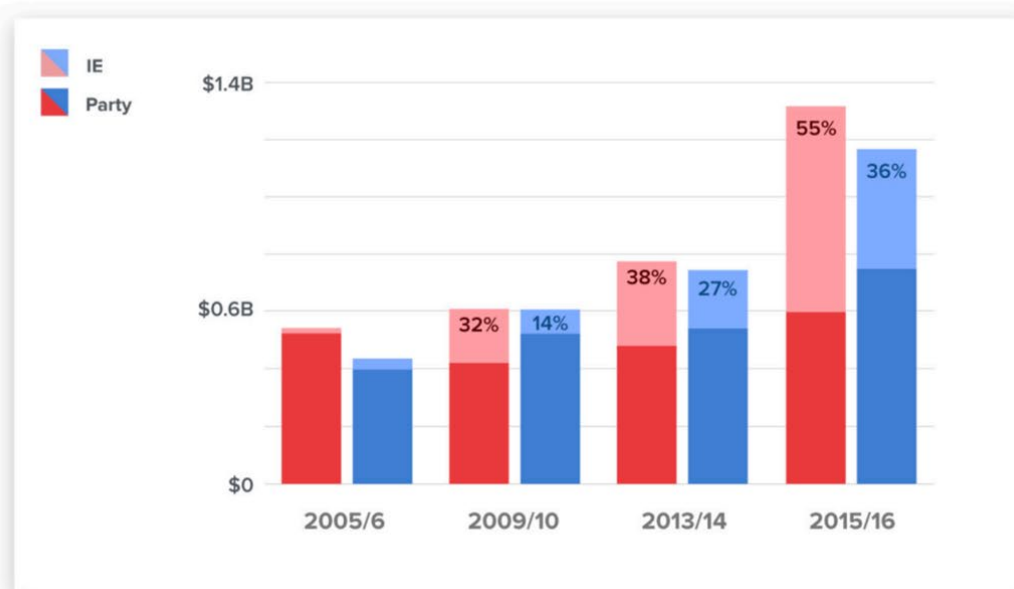
Treat sessions as confidential.  
Outside the retreat do not attribute comments to others.

## THE GROWING PRIVATIZATION OF POLITICS

This slide highlights the relative growth of IE expenditures versus party expenditures. By 2016, Republican IE spending was actually greater—55%—than party spending. For Dems, it was one-third IE/two thirds party. But note the continuing growth.

Thus, a dramatic shift is underway:

- **Non-party IE spending** is rapidly exceeding **party** spending;
- The influence of party spending is **concomitantly waning**; and
- These trends appear to be **rapidly accelerating**.

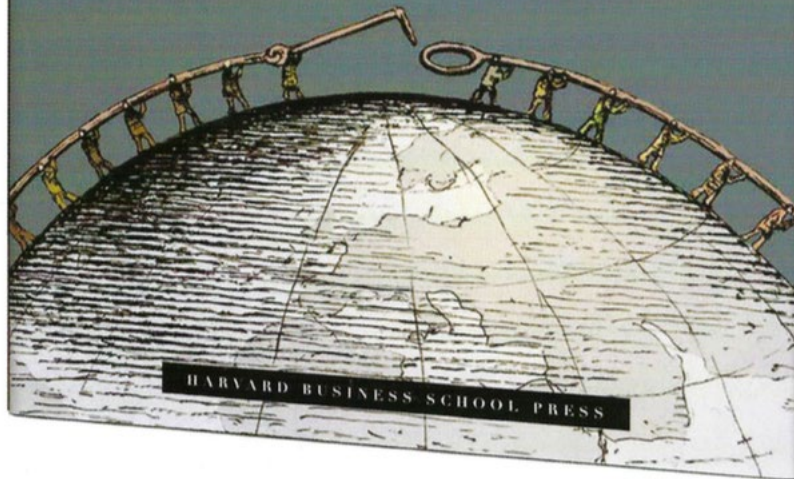


"Exactly what the world needs now... insightful and engaging."  
—From the foreword by William Ury, coauthor, *Getting to Yes*

# Leading THROUGH Conflict

*How Successful Leaders Transform  
Differences into Opportunities*

Mark Gerzon



HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL PRESS

2006

DEMAGOGUE

“hyperpartisan”

“them”-hating

dehumanizing

untruthful

dividing

destructive

MANAGER

“partisan”

“us”-centered

self-interested

“semi-truthful”

compartmentalizing

productive

MEDIATOR

“transpartisan”

**integral**

**systemic**

**truthful**

**bridging**

**synergistic**

## Mediators build bridges by:

- A. Creating a safe, respectful environment
- B. Communicating across belief systems
- C. Championing strong questions (not weak answers)
- D. **Before *taking sides*, *exploring sides* and *innovating*.**

# CONFLICT 101

- **Warm up** “cold conflict” so that it focuses civic energy, participation and creative problem-solving
- **Cool down** “hot conflict” so that stakeholders can focus on collaboration and find common ground
- Lead stakeholders toward a “**temperature zone**” for “cooking” **innovative solutions**

THE  
REUNITED  
STATES OF  
AMERICA



2016



# Lead your communities:

1. From Confirming to Learning
2. From Control to Relationship
3. From Position-Taking to Problem Solving
4. From Endless Campaigning to Public Service

# DEBATE

- Assumes your “side” has the right answer.
- Combative: participants attempt to prove the other side wrong
- About winning
- Listening to make your point
- Defending one’s own views against those of others
- Seeks adoption of one option
- (“winner”)and rejection of the other (“loser”)

# DIALOGUE

- Assumes many people have pieces of the answer
- Collaborative: participants work together
- About learning
- Listening for understanding
- Seeks to improve & strengthen one’s views
- Discovers new options and new possibilities.



1. **REACH** Build cross-partisan, co-leader relationships
2. **RIPPLE** Pick issues where you can go beyond *positions* to *interests* and *needs*
3. **ROAR** Mobilize courageous message, media, money (but not too much!)
4. **RECRUIT** Incentivize your party leaders to be allies and catalyze citizen support
5. **REMEMBER** You can still “fight to win” about other issues, just not this one!

# PUTTING YOUR VALUES INTO ACTION:

- *What is the across-the-aisle opportunity you might explore?*
- *What obstacles could prevent you from seizing that opportunity?*
- *What next step might YOU take?*

# Better Together America

**Creating a national nonpartisan support network of local democracy hubs paired with a national combined funding campaign to catalyze and connect the field of democracy.**



## Project Goals

- Align partners
- Develop capacity building resources
- Accelerate & support democracy hubs
- Combined Fundraising

## Outcomes

- Healthier political discourse
- Capacity to effectively tackle key challenges
- A support network of state & local democracy hubs

# FOR MORE INFORMATION:

- *The Reunited States of America: How To Bridge the Partisan Divide* (Amazon)
- *The Reunited States* documentary (Amazon Prime)
- **Civic Renewal Playbook** (Braver Angels)
- *Leading Through Conflict: How Effective Leaders Transform Differences into Opportunities* (Harvard Business School Press)

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