

BETRAYED BY THE PERMANENT CAMPAIGN

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Every two years the American politics industry fills the airwaves with the most virulent, scurrilous, wall-to-wall character assassination of nearly every political practitioner in the country - and then declares itself puzzled that America has lost trust in its politicians.—Charles Krauthammer

Biggest Problem America Faces

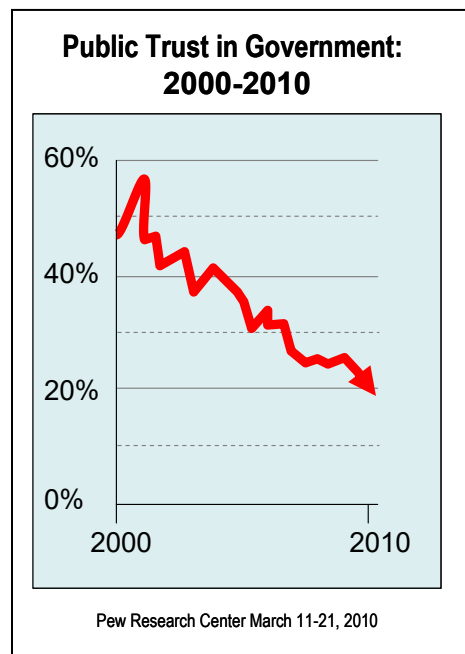
*We face more than a deficit of dollars ...
We face a deficit of trust – deep and corrosive doubts about how Washington works that have been growing for years.*

--State of the Union Address; January 27, 2010

Today we do face a number of crises, but the biggest one is not being addressed; and getting worse every week – the Trust Deficit.

When statistics were first collected at the end of the Eisenhower administration and during the Kennedy administration, nearly 80% of Americans affirmatively answered the question “*Do you trust government just about always or most of the time?*”

Today, four out of five Americans *distrust* their government – the lowest it’s ever been, and continuing to plummet. It’s a sorry state of affairs when we trust Congress just a bit more than a used car salesman. Polls show that citizens are disgusted with the performance of Congress and ready to sweep out incumbents.



Consequences If We Don't Solve this Problem

Not dealing with this problem has enormous consequences to a democracy. At what point does a democracy become so demoralized that the electorate no longer votes? Or opens the path for a demagogue? Or becomes utterly disgusted, leading to revolt?

The plunging lack of citizen trust is triggering caustic emotional cynicism. The Tea Party is the just the tip of the emotional iceberg, and Congress is perceived as the navigator of the oblivious ship Titanic detached from constituent accountability. Despite the emotional satisfaction of ostracizing those currently in power, that’s just trading the devil we know for the devil we don’t know. It fails to address the real problem, which has become so entrenched in recent years it has blended into the fabric of modern politics. The problem is due neither to the influence of lobbyists nor corrupt politicians.

The Permanent Campaign

The real culprit for the trust deficit is that campaigns are now being conducted *after the campaign is over* – perpetual campaigning has now become the foundation of elected governance.

Vicious campaigning is nothing new in our land. Demonizing the opponent, sowing fear, uncertainty, doubt, and distrust in the minds of the electorate has been a marginally effective, though messy, method of getting one's candidate elected.

What's different today is that campaigning no longer ends with winning a race. Pollsters, campaign operatives and image consultants, in a swagger to manipulate public opinion, now rule the roost. They perpetually provide advice on how to get re-elected, not just during the campaign, but during the elected official's entire tenure in office, obliterating the possibility of acting according to conscience following Edmund Burke's sage advice...

"As your Member of Parliament, I owe you my industry; but if I sacrifice my judgment for your opinion, I have not served you well."

Many of today's elected officials keep their ears glued to their campaign advisors, who daily blast opponents, real or imagined – make the other side look bad, block them at every cross-roads, stop them dead in their tracks, bludgeon them on every issue, vilify them to ruin their credibility, blame the other side for all our problems, and on and on. Below-the-belt campaigning is a dangerous way to get elected, and a reckless way to govern, making it treasonous to cross party lines to work constructively with the other side.

Fear may win elections, but it's a two-edged sword, because it's the essence of distrust. No sane person trusts those adept at spreading fear through character assassination, bold-faced aggression, manipulation, denial, blaming, and coercion – now the defining qualities of our elected representatives. This is the betrayal by the permanent campaign; it's hijacking our democracy and the rule of representation; it's the core of the trust deficit.

What must be Done to Save our Democracy

Since the State of the Union address, neither party has put forth a proposal to solve the trust deficit. Thus we propose initial principles:

1. *Make trust a campaign issue:*
Trust is the result of people acting with strong values, ethics, honor, and conscience -- the characteristics of great leaders. Campaigns must emphasize these qualities in the minds of the electorate. Demand all candidates to pledge not to lie, cheat or steal while in office, or on the campaign trail.
2. *Engage in Bipartisanship:*
Fully a third of American voters are Independents – affiliated as neither Republicans nor Democrats. They are the voters that actually determine the outcomes of elections. Independents don't want gridlock, they are disenfranchised by the polarization of politics – Bipartisanship shows these voters a candidate wants to get the job done first and foremost.
3. *Put your constituency top-of-mind:*
Running for office means, inherently, that one must put their self-interest behind, making the "greater good" paramount. People trust those who put the common-wealth ahead of personal wealth and power. If personal gain is the motive, you shouldn't be running for office as a public servant.

4. *Make Virtue, not Viciousness, paramount:*
There was once a time when being a liberal or a conservative meant something; people could distinguish positions and values. Now, it's "oppose anything the other side advocates." The politics of integrity, perseverance, courage, and trust emphasizes standing *for* something first, not *always against* the opposition.
5. *Bury the Hatchet:*
Ronald Reagan's and Tip O'Neil's conduct after an election is a fine example of reconciliation. While very different in political views, following the 1980 election these two powerhouses became work-horses, rolling up their sleeves, and focusing their energies on solving the nation's problems. Their collaboration, despite their differences built trust in government.
6. *Honor Differences:*
All great leaders understand that *differentials in thinking* are the real source of creativity and innovation. Our founding fathers, while seldom agreeing, were very aware that in their differences lay the well-spring of new insights and solutions. It is by using our diverse viewpoints constructively that we will conquer the problems of poverty, the economy, and the environment.
7. *Balance the Rhetoric:*
Bring back the balance in rhetoric between logos, ethos, and pathos. Emphasize accurate facts (logos), presented in a trustworthy manner (ethos), adding only a reasonable amount of emotional appeal (pathos).

In the latter part of the 18th century Edmund Burke cautioned the British people,

"All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing. "

The future of our Republic is at stake.