

Congressional Civility

Honors Capstone

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Congressional Civility_____ **Overview**

The intent and purpose of this paper is to analyze the importance of civility in Congress. This analysis will hopefully lead the reader to share the conclusion reached which is that civility is absolutely essential to our government and indeed to the overall American way of life. Without civility Congress and our values will be subject to abject failure. Emphasizing this foundational truth is the purpose of the first section of this essay. The next section will discuss a few historical examples of incivility and stress the point that incivility is not a mere result of divisive issues or of conflict itself but rather a result of uncivil personalities and selfish behavior. Once this historical foundation has been laid the analysis will move into the current age discussing recent examples of incivility. The purpose of this recent history section is to reveal that incivility is an unfortunate immediate reality not merely a thing of the past. The final section of the essay will then attempt to lay out a way of thinking which returns to the general thesis, which is that civility is absolutely essential, while also taking a greater step by connecting this thesis with the overarching importance of adhering to the most basic commandments of all: “Love the Lord your God” and “Love your neighbor as yourself.”

This final conclusion may at first glance appear to be beyond the legitimate scope of this paper topic. I believe, however, that my entire collegiate education has been pointing me towards the sheer importance of these two rules. As such I have deemed it appropriate to conclude this honors thesis, which is essentially meant to reflect upon what my education at American University has taught me, with a brief analysis of the importance of these words and how they are directly relevant, and indeed vitally important, to the pursuit of Congressional civility.

Congressional Civility _____ Introduction

On September 5th, 2007 Jack Kingston published a press release which quickly grabbed the attention of everyone who saw it. Kingston's press release read as follows

“Demoncrats and Republicans Split Over Government Healthcare”.

In case you missed it the press release stated *Demoncrats* not *Democrats*. One might think that a literal demonization of the Democratic Party might have caused a huge uproar. After all, Kingston wasn't just saying that the Democrats were wrong; his press release title implied that they were evil, on the side with the devil. Was there any outrage though? Not really. The story was picked up in a small section of Congressional Quarterly. A few other news agencies printed the CQ story but nothing more came from it. Kingston thus got away with calling the Democrats demons while his press secretary, Krista Cole, quickly whisked away the scandal stating that it was “an obvious typo” (Kelly, 2007)

Shocking? Perhaps. But then perhaps not. In many ways, this was too be expected, specially coming from someone like Kingston. Jack Kingston is a Republican Representative from Georgia who has gained a clear reputation for using, at the very least, ‘strong’ words when speaking about the rival Democratic Party. USA today described him as “one of the most partisan Republicans in the House” (15 May 2004). Congressional Quarterly has recorded him saying a wide range of partisan remarks ranging from calling “the Democrats everything from a ‘party of whiners’ to an ‘economically ignorant’ bunch that ‘could care less about families’ (Kelly, 2007).

It was this reputation which helped propel him to the leadership of a group of Republican representatives who came to be known as the “theme team”. The “Theme Team, which Kingston headed beginning in 1997, according to USA Today, “daily faced their Democratic

counterparts in a series of verbal volleys that transformed the House ritual of session-opening one-minute speeches into a loud, partisan, and often-humorous morning debate.” You can see why Kingston’s ‘obvious typo’ thus did not upset anyone.

This kind of behavior was expected from him and his colleagues. Indeed, this kind of behavior was not only expected and normal it was also (as the USA Today article attests) seen as “often-humorous”. The acceptance of this behavior is no where better illustrated than by the mere fact that even after being made aware of the alleged typo the demonizing statement was still posted on Kingston’s website and, according to CQ, it had “been moved to a prominent spot on the opening page”.

Now, to be fair the example above is quite unique, and indeed some may find it quite humorous. Furthermore this hyperbolic example is not characteristic of every member of the House or Senate. Yet the example begs the question; to what end does all of this lead? If this is the level of discourse which our national leaders choose to use in the sacred halls of our national capitol where does it end? Such a level comity or lack thereof is not acceptable. Why? Because civility is absolutely essential.

Congressional Civility _____ Civility is Absolutely Essential

Civility is absolutely essential! Think on it for a moment. The entire system by which we operate, the democratic system, depends upon genuine respect for our fellow man and woman. This is elementary. At the risk of boring my reader allow me to briefly illustrate. The Declaration of Independence states emphatically that we in America “hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness”. If all men are created equal, and indeed if all men have ‘certain unalienable rights’, does not it follow then, that all we must respect the equality and rights of our fellow wo/man? And in order to respect their equality and their rights do not we also have to respect them themselves? Indeed we do, for arguably respect is their fundamental right; the right to be respected for merely being. Your ideas and your actions might be completely unrespectable but you still maintain some base elemental right of respect merely because you are who you are. This is the basis for human rights: you are human; therefore you have rights which no other human can take away. This requires, even if only at a very slight level, respect.

Again allow me to illustrate. The next line of the declaration states “That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” Thus, to ensure that our rights are secure we come together to create government which then derives its just powers from our freely given consent. The word ‘consent’ now becomes very important.

What does consent mean? The Random House Unabridged Dictionary definition is as follows:

1. To permit, approve, or agree; comply or yield (often fol. by *to* or an infinitive):

He consented to the proposal. We asked her permission, and she consented.

2. Archaic. To agree in sentiment, opinion, etc.; be in harmony.
3. Permission, approval, or agreement; compliance; acquiescence: He gave his consent to the marriage.
4. Agreement in sentiment, opinion, a course of action, etc.: By common consent he was appointed official delegate.
5. Archaic. accord; concord; harmony

Consent thus means, principally, permission, agreement, approval and harmony. Using this definition it is evident that consent requires respect.

Permission, agreement and approval all require some level of respect towards whatever is being agreed or approved of. Respect is defined as “deference to a right, privilege, privileged positions, or someone or something considered to have certain rights or privileges” (respect, 2007). Furthermore respect is also defined, by Random House, as “esteem for or a sense of the worth or excellence of a person, a personal quality or ability, or something considered as a manifestation of a personal quality or ability.” If you grant permission to an individual than you must first hold that individual in some esteem. If you agree with an individual you must first give deference to the individual with which you are agreeing. And indeed if you approve of another you will hold for them a certain level of esteem. Putting this together it is easy to conclude that consent requires respect.

The Douglas Harper Etymology Dictionary describes that the word respect is derived from the Latin word, *respectus*, which means ‘regard’ or literally the ‘act of looking back at one’. What is consent of the governed if it is not the act of governing while looking back to the governed to ensure that you are well within their regard? Knowing this then the conclusion is inescapable, the act of consent requires the act of respect.

You are probably now asking, so what does this have to do with civility? I will explain if only you would allow me just one more glance into the dictionary. The definition of civility (as

defined by Random House) is very simple: Courtesy; politeness. Likewise, civil, the clear root of civility, is defined by Random House as adhering to the norms of polite social intercourse; not deficient in common courtesy or marked by benevolence. We have already seen how consent requires respect. What is respect if it is not showing courtesy and politeness? Consent thus requires respect and respect in turn requires civility. Furthermore, the founding fathers concluded that our government derives its power “from the consent of the governed”. Consent is therefore our “norm of polite social intercourse”. Thus not only is civility required to maintain a government based upon consent but consent itself is an act of civility.

Perhaps now your mind is jumbled up in hoops and turns but here is the point: the terms consent, respect and civility all depend on each other. Consent requires respect. Respect in turn is an act of civility. Consent therefore requires civility.

This means that without civility our system of government and arguably our way of life is no longer possible. If Representative Jack Kingston’s rhetoric becomes the norm of our governing system the system itself will collapse. The demonization of the Democratic Party by Kingston shows no respect to the people of the Democratic Party in any way shape or form. Kingston’s rhetoric strips away their humanity and replaces it with evil devilry. This act goes flies in the face of the respect and civility which both the Senate and the House of Representatives must have in order to function.

Civility therefore is absolutely essential to our democratic system.

Congressional Civility_____ Civility is Essential Illustrated by Lee Hamilton

This basic truth is summed up in a contemporary article published by former Representative Lee Hamilton. Hamilton served in Congress for 34 years. His long tenure in Congress undoubtedly has given him much wisdom into how the institution functions. In an article titled, *In Congress, Courtesy Matters*, Hamilton wrote that;

“When Congress convened in January, those who were watching got treated to a small but revealing moment: as John Boehner, the new minority leader of the House, was handling the House gavel over to incoming Speaker Nancy Pelosi, he looked out at the assembled members and told them, “Be Nice.”

“It might have sounded like a jocular and insignificant point, but if Congress follows any single admonition this year, I hope that it’s that one”

“In truth, it shouldn’t even need saying. For an individual legislator, cultivating congenial relationships with other legislators ought to be a matter of habit. In order to get anything done, especially if it involves legislation, you have to work constantly to line up support, convince others that what you want to accomplish matters, and make it clear that you’re worth listening to. Even if others don’t agree with your goals, they’ll still respect your efforts and at least listen to your arguments”.

The article then continues with a discussion on the lessons Congress should have learned after the 1994 takeover by the Republican Party. After actively encouraging the new Democratic majority to take these lessons to heart he concluded his words of wisdom with one more remark:

“...Let’s be honest: The majority can always come up with reasons for taking shortcuts that allow it to act. That’s not the point. The point is that in our democracy, the process is every bit important as the legislation it produces. Fairness and trust should be the coin of the realm.”

Hamilton's conclusion and summary words of wisdom are thus simple, civility matters! These words reveal that the topic of civility is not one of yesteryear. Civility was not merely important during the times of our forefathers. It was relevant back then and it continues to be so even now.

Congressional Civility_____ Civility as an Important means of Resolving Conflict

In order to be clear I must point out that civility does not require agreement nor does it demand that you respect ideas with which you disagree. The base level of civility which I am referencing in this paper is merely that which respects the humanity of the opposition member and which respects the peaceable norms and institutions set up to allow for efficient and effective government. In the interest of further clarifying, civility does not mean the absence of conflict or debate. Indeed any peace and conflict resolution student will tell you that conflict naturally happens even amongst the most loving friends. Conflict and civility thus do not negate each other. Civility rather is revealed in the midst of conflict for civil behavior helps mediate and even solve conflict.

The example of the Iraq study group beautifully illustrates this point. The Iraq study group was set up in 2006 to help decipher options and solutions to the Iraq war. The conflict in Iraq and the respective U.S. action in the region is one of the most divisive issues of the current day. Yet while the issue is indeed polarizing in many ways the Iraq Study Group was able to demonstrate “genuine bipartisanship” which Washington Post author David Broder believed should “serve as an example to the broader political world.

Leon Panetta, former Democratic Congressman, summed up the goal of the group: “These are people who have very different views but are comfortable trying to understand each other and coming together to solve a terrible issue facing the country” (Broder, 2006). The ten members of the commission thus came to the table with various conflicting views on the subject in front of them yet they were still able to come to a consensus together on what steps should be taken to solve the crises.

This begs the question was this managed? The answer seems to lie merely in the attitude in which the commission was carried out. Commission member, Al Simpson (former Republican senator from Wyoming) stated that “We quickly stopped considering ourselves as Republicans and Democrats, but as Americans trying to deal with a most urgent problem. Simpson continued saying that “We went over the recommendations word by word till everyone was satisfied [...] no one was trying to sneak anything in, and no one was laying traps. It was a very powerful experience” (Broder, 2006). The conflict thus was managed in a respectful, professional, ordered and generally civil manner and as such a solution was put together and agreed upon by consensus. The conflict could have, due to the complexity and polarity of the issue, have failed but because the various differences were managed through civility the commission succeeded in its endeavor.

A general conclusion reached by the members of the commission was that this kind of civility could be, and indeed should be, replicated by the elected officials of our nation. To this end Panetta stated that

“our forefathers intended that a process like this work for people elected to office – the president and members of Congress in both the House and Senate. They believed they would come from different places but ultimately find consensus – that was the Miracle of Philadelphia” (Broder, 2006).

Simpson followed suit stating that

“this could be an example, not only of how to handle Iraq, but it could apply to immigration, Social Security and all those other things that have been hung up for so long. That’s what this last election said; get serious and get your work done...I hope Washington is listening” (Broder, 2006).

Indeed don’t we all.

The Unfortunate Historical Reality of Uncivil Acts and Personalities.

All too often however Washington has turned a deaf ear to the repeated calls for civility. Our history is rich with episodes of blatant disregard for not only other members of Congress but also for the institution itself. Unfortunately that history has followed us clear up to today. “The situation certainly isn’t as bad as other countries” Representative Hamilton has stated, “where we see brawls and fistfights breaking out among members of parliament, but it does merit some attention.” This then is the goal of the next section of this paper; to give attention to the historical reality of incivility in our nation.

Anyone who says that our modern congress has declined way past the noble levels of our forefathers simply does not know the history of Congress. Augustus Foster, a visitor from England and aid to the British minister to the U.S. in the early 1800s, put it succinctly, “[to] judge from their Congress, one should suppose the nation to be the most blackguard society that was ever brought together (Chiles, 1995). This damning comment implies what is unavoidably true: incivility in Congress is an unfortunate historical reality.

Everyone has heard, at least on some level, of a few of the acts which occurred way back in the annals of history. Such acts as the beating of abolitionist Senator Sumner by Congressman Brooks have become legendary in American folklore. This act however is not the sole severe act of incivility which occurred during the early years of American history. Brooks is joined by the likes many others: Jonathan Cilley, William Graves, Henry Clay, John Randolph, Matthew Lyon, Roger Griswold...the list could go on for quite some time.

These individuals have a special place in history. Yet analyzing them and their history does not only serve the purpose of adding to the American folklore of outlandish Congressional behavior. Understanding them and their history, rather, helps to illustrate an important point: the

crux of an uncivil act lies not merely in the conflict or crises itself but rather with the uncivil personality and selfishness behind the act. The brief history given below reveals just how easily, and often, natural conflict can turn deadly when the raging passions of uncivil personalities, men and women, are left unchecked.

Congressional Civility_____History: Sumner vs. Brooks

Where better to start this historical analysis than with the legendary caning of Senator Sumner? On May 22, 1856 Representative Preston Brooks entered the Senate after its adjournment and proceeded to beat Senator Sumner over the head with his cane to the point of unconsciousness. According to the official Senate historians (as available at Senate.gov) the attack proceeded as follows:

“After the Senate had adjourned for the day, Brooks entered the old chamber, where he found Sumner busily attaching his postal frank to copies of his "Crime Against Kansas" speech. “Moving quickly, Brooks slammed his metal-topped cane onto the unsuspecting Sumner's head. As Brooks struck again and again, Sumner rose and lurched blindly about the chamber, futilely attempting to protect himself. After a very long minute, it ended. “Bleeding profusely, Sumner was carried away. Brooks walked calmly out of the chamber without being detained by the stunned onlookers. Overnight, both men became heroes in their respective regions. (Senate.gov, 2007).

The account is almost unbelievable! Brooks simply walked into the chamber, beat Sumner bloody and then walked out with nobody attempting to stop him.

Why did all this happen? Turns out that Sumner actually started the personal attacks. Sumner was an anti-Slavery Republican from Massachusetts and he had delivered an address known as the ‘Crime against Kansas’ speech in which he argued why Kansas should not be admitted as a slave state. The Senate account details the extent which Sumner went to blast his opponents:

“In his "Crime Against Kansas" speech, Sumner identified two Democratic senators as the principal culprits in this crime—Stephen Douglas of Illinois and Andrew Butler of South Carolina. He characterized Douglas to his face as a "noise-some, squat, and nameless animal . . . not a proper model for an American senator." Andrew Butler, who was not present, received more elaborate

treatment. Mocking the South Carolina senator's stance as a man of chivalry, the Massachusetts senator charged him with taking "a mistress . . . who, though ugly to others, is always lovely to him; though polluted in the sight of the world, is chaste in his sight—I mean," added Sumner, "the harlot, Slavery" (Senate.gov, 2007)

These personal attacks apparently had a profound effect on Representative Brooks who happened to be a relative of Butler. Thus three days later Brooks entered the Senate chamber and carried out his attack.

In the end both the Senator and the Representative were able to continue their service. Brooks survived a House censure resolution and then resigned only to be promptly reelected. Sumner took over three and a half years to recover from the beating but he continued to serve in the Senate for another 18 years.

This legendary event perfectly illustrates the point that mere conflict is not the cause of incivility. Selfish men (and women) are. Sumner's comments did not respect Douglas and Butler and likewise Brooks shared no respect for Sumner. The Senate.gov account makes this very clear. It states that "If [Brooks] had believed Sumner to be a gentleman, he might have challenged him to a duel. Instead, he chose a light cane of the type used to discipline unruly dogs". Granted the backdrop of this issue was the divisive slavery debate. Yet it was not the issue of slavery that in the end boiled the blood of Brooks. What got Brooks going were the personal attacks made by Sumner. Brooks fought back in a like manner only this time however he went way beyond words into physical force. The uncivil manner of Brooks therefore, egged on by the likewise uncivil manner of Sumner, is at the root cause of this historically famed act of incivility.

Congressional Civility_____ History: Uncivil Personalities as the Root Cause

The Sumner beating is, therefore, an excellent case study revealing how uncivil personalities are at the root of uncivil acts. Other historical cases support this conclusion. One such case is the clash which occurred between the fiery personalities of John Randolph and Willis Alston. Historian James Chiles records what happened:

“At a dinner in Miss shield’s boardinghouse, Representative John Randolph of Virginia, another Jeffersonian, and Representative Willis Alston, a Federalist from North Carolina, ended an evening of verbal insult by throwing glassware at each other. They managed not to interact for the next six ears –until Alson insulted Randolph one day on their way out of session. Randolph whacked Alston on the head with his riding crop, drawing blood, and paid a fine of \$20 for the privilege”

This brief historical record points out again that it is wild personalities, not mere issues, which are behind the famous acts of incivility. In case there is any lingering doubt allow Chiles to describe one of the infamous characters of this feud:

“Tall and pale, with black hair, Randolph dressed in buckskin riding clothes, carried a riding crop and often strode into the house with one or two hunting dogs at heel. But what truly distinguished him was his savage wit. He had a habit of pointing an index finger like grim Death while hurling remarks at adversaries. He once described a colleague as “the most contemptible and degrading of beings, whom no man ought to touch, unless with a pair of tongs” [...] Eventually, [Randolph’s] language grew so sarcastic and abusive that many senators simply left the chamber when he was speaking” (Chiles, 1995).

This description lends immediate support to the conclusion that incivility begins with man and not with mere issues. Issues and party alignment bring stress and conflict to the fore. That cannot be agued. Yet, at the same time, any good peace and conflict resolution student will tell you that conflict itself is natural and it can be handled in a very peaceable and civil manner.

Characters like Randolph simply did not handle conflict in a civil manner. Issues themselves were not the root cause of Randolph's incivility; Randolph was the cause of Randolph's incivility.

Congressional Civility_____History: The Incivility of Duels

What about the famed duels which occurred in the early days of our nation? Our history records quite a few high stake duels which took place between various leaders of our government. Were not these duels a “civil” or respectable way to manage conflict back in their day? Of course not! Duels never led to the advancement of government or the creation of policy! Duels were a way for members of Congress to maintain their honor; that is true. But civility isn’t about maintaining your own honor. It is about ensuring and respecting the honor of your colleagues and of the institution as a whole even when your own honor has been undermined by another member. Duels thus are not, and were not, civil means of managing conflict. In fact if you think on it duels are not conflict management or resolution at all! It is merely personal attack gone extreme!

Take a look again at the Randolph and his historical record. In 1812 an epic feud between Randolph and another wild personality, Henry Clay of Kentucky, was born. Chiles provides the historical narrative:

“The Clay-Randolph feud began in 1812, when Clay refused to entertain Randolph’s resolution against the declaration of war. In 1820, after the House approved the Missouri Compromise [...] Clay again thwarted Randolph, this time refusing his motion to reconsider the bill. Not that Clay thought the action would change the vote—he simply didn’t want to give Randolph the satisfaction of seeming to control the business of the house. At every turn the two men butted heads. In 1826, they finally faced off in a duel.”

Here again it is evident that two fiery personalities clashed creating the end result of a duel. This duel was not fought in order to determine the outcome of legislation or how a dispute was going to be resolved. It was fought, rather, with the sole purpose of declaring which man was on top. The conflicts between Randolph and Clay were not substantive, merely based on issues. Yes,

issues were again present but the conflicting opinions could have been managed in a productive and civil manner. Clay, for instance, could have helped manage the conflict by allowing the motion to reconsider. Doing so probably would have led to the same vote and Randolph would have felt acknowledged and respected by Clay. The opposite however was done and that nearly led to death (both participants survived the duel).

A less fortunate outcome often arose out of these uncivil duels. The duel on February 24, 1838, between Representatives Jonathan Cilley and William Graves provides a sad, but perfect, example. The feud between the two men began when Cilley “made some comments in a session that offended” Graves (Chiles, 1995). Graves responded to the offensive words by proposing a duel which Cilley at first was opposed to. “Eventually,” the Thomaston Historical Society records, “Cilley was forced into accepting the challenge when it was said that he needed to ‘preserve the honor of the New England States’” (Thomaston Historical Society, 1997). Thus the fatal duel was held.

The truth that incivility is spurred on by wild men is overwhelmingly supported by what happened next. Graves and Cilley set out for the duel and fired off two rounds from their rifles. Both rounds missed. The men could have walked away, as Chiles comments, “with everyone’s honor and health intact” were it not for Henry A. Wise (a Tyler Democrat out of Virginia):

“After each of the two rounds, Jonathan's second tried to reach an agreement and call off the duel but Mr. Henry Wise, Graves' Second, would hear nothing of it.

Round three proved fatal. Jonathan, shot through the lower abdomen, died of blood loss on the spot (Thomaston Historical Society, 1997).

Thus, what could have ended peacefully wound up with blood being shed all because of one man: Wise.

Wise is known to history as an “angry, abrasive fellow” on all accounts (Chiles, 1995). The then clerk of the House of Representatives, Benjamin Brown French wrote that Wise had “shot his former friend, Coke, through the arm, in a duel. His wife and brother have died, his house has been burned, he has been either a principle, or a second, in three duels, in each of which blood has been shed” (Chiles, 1995). It was this wild personality which egged Graves on after the second round. “Kill that damn Yankee” he yelled and minutes late freshman Congressman Cilley lay dead (Chiles, 1995).

This duel started out as a means to retain ones own honor. It was in no way a legitimate civil means of mediating a preexisting conflict. A Congressional investigation of the entire matter concluded that Cilley’s death was “a brutal political murder” (Thomason Historical Society, 1997). Outrage followed and soon duels were banned across the country.

The outrage was not merely in response to the duel itself, duels were quite common in those days, the outrage however was more over the unnecessary influence of politics in this duel. The Thomason Historical Society argues that “The duel was actually a contrived way to assault Cilley who was gaining power in the House of Representatives and posing a political threat to the southern leadership on several hotly contested issues.” Political aspirations clearly had a play in this act of incivility. However, to be clear, the political aspirations which led to Cilley’s death were not centered on an issue. The conflict rather was raised when the political power and fortunes of one group were put into question by another party. What was at the center of this conflict then? An issue? No! Man and his selfish desire for power and authority. This well known reality points to a general truth which should be equally well known: incivility is firmly rooted in selfishness. This is a theme which will be picked up in the conclusion of this essay.

Congressional Civility _____ History: In Depth Case Study

It is evident then based upon the historical record that uncivil personalities are at the heart of incivility. The brawl which took place between Representative Matthew Lyon of Vermont and Representative Roger Griswold of Connecticut is an excellent case study which reveals this point. A bitter resentment held by these two men eventually led to a viscous fight on February 15, 1789 where canes and fireplace tongs were quickly turned into weapons. The event is well documented and thus provides an excellent in depth study for this paper. In addition this case study also reveals the veracity of the overall thesis of this paper; that civility is essential and without it our government ceases to exist efficiently and effectively.

Before describing the event it is important to note the context surrounding Lyon. History places Lyon clearly in opposition to the Federalist Party. A Washington Post article written by Andrew Gyory in 1998 reveals the extent of this opposition:

“After taking office in 1797, he [Lyon] clashed at once with what he called the ‘Aristor-Tory faction,’ mocking its elitist airs, ‘royalist’ ceremonies and fawning deference to President John Adams [...] Lyon branded them ‘pettifoggers’ who had little respect for democracy and were ‘interested in keeping the government at a distance from and out of sight of the people who support it.’”

The Federalists in turn had a strong dislike for Lyon. Gyory writes, “Angry Federalists denounced the “Lyon of Vermont” as a “beast,” a “monkey,” a “hog and an “ass,” descended from the “dregs and scum of Ireland.””

Lyon, for his part did not exactly discourage these kinds of remarks. His actions were all too often the root cause of the Federalist comments and he himself freely bemoaned the fact that “Vermonters’ ‘plainness of manners [...] forbids all pageantry” (Gyory, 1998). One quick example which reveals this rather wild nature of Lyon is that which was given in testimony to the House Committee of the Whole. The testimony was given by Senator Nathaniel Chipman

during the debate, which ensued after Lyon's initial confrontation with Griswold, over the question whether Lyon should be expelled from the Chamber because of his actions. Chipman testified that during a discussion between himself, Lyon and one other individual (Mr. Bradley) Lyon became very upset. Chipman's letter, as revealed by the official House records the rest of the story:

"He [Lyon] soon discovered himself to be some what irritated, and in a very rude and pointed manner declared that no man who had a spark of honesty could have reported as I had done. Attacked in this rude manner, I retorted, in a passion, that he was an ignorant Irish Puppy.

"My Lyon rose in a violent passion, grasped at my hair, that was turned back with a comb, which he broke in the grasp. I was at that moment mending a pen; I instantly rose, intending to revenge the insult with the knife in my hand; but Mr. Bradley had seized upon Mr. Lyon from behind, round the arms, and drew him back a little, upon which, Mr. Lyon, bearing himself in Mr. Bradley's arms, threw his feet upon the table to kick across. The awkward appearance of Mr. Lyon at this moment, and the grimaces of his countenance, provoke me to laugh. I dropt the penknife, seized Mr. Lyons feet, and, in this manner, with the held of Mr. Bradley, who still kept his hold, carried him across the room, and laid him on his back in a corner. Mr. Bradley and I returned to our seats, laughing very merrily at the scene. In the meantime, Mr. Lyon rose from his corner, stood a short time in apparent agitation, and without uttering a word. At length he turned upon his heel, with these expressions: 'Damn it, I will not be mad' forced a laugh and left the room" (University of Chicago, 2000).

This short little story reveals the volatile nature of Lyon. With this backdrop set it is now appropriate to delve further into the events which led to the February 15th brawl.

The conflict on the 15th did not begin on that day. The origination of the conflict rather resulted from words said and actions taken days before on January 30th. The House clerks were putting together a tally of the votes cast in a previous matter (the impeachment of Senator

William Blount). During this time the Speaker of the House Jonathan Dayton stepped down from the Speakers chair while. As the Speaker was not presiding the assumption was that the House was not in order. Representative Lyon thus stepped forward and held an informal conversation with the Speaker and other Representatives and, it was alleged, the volume of his voice made is quite clear that “he intended to be heard by all those who were near him (Neff, 1999). Yale University Historian Brian T. Neff provides a description of this initial ‘discussion’:

“Standing ‘without the bar of the House,’ debating the merits of the recently proposed foreign intercourse bill with numerous colleagues, Matthew Lyon began to rant about the ‘malign influence of Connecticut politicians.’ He boldly accused the Connecticut Federalists of hypocrisy and corruption, asserting that they ‘acted in opposition to the interests and opinions of nine-tenths of their constituents.’ He charged them with ‘pursuing their own private views.’ Greedily seeking offices for the sole sake of power and title, and eradicating political opposition through an unjust monopoly of the press. Sarcastically, he accused the Federalists of brainwashing their constituents with opiates, claiming finally that ‘if he should go into Connecticut, and manage a press there six months, he could effect a revolution, and turn out the present Representatives.”

Roger Griswold was, of course, a Federalist and one of the members from Connecticut. He heard Lyon’s comments and took offense to them. His response was to offer up the witticism “If you go into Connecticut, you had better wear your wooden sword” (University of Chicago, 2000) to his colleagues. This comment poked fun at the fact that Lyon had been given a temporary dishonorable discharge from the Continental Army. At first, it is said, Lyon either did not hear Griswold’s comment or he simply chose to ignore it. Griswold would not let the matter lie however. He got up and walked to Lyon and repeated his comment, “will you fight me with your wooden sword?” to Lyon’s face (Neff, 1999). This time Lyon did take offense. Historian Neff records what followed:

“Insulted, embarrassed, and dishonored before his fellow Representatives, Lyon spat straight in Griswold’s face. Without a word, Griswold wiped the spit with a cloth and exited the chambers. The Committee of Privileges instantly drew up a formal resolution calling for the expulsion of Matthew Lyon.”

The resolution read as follows:

“Resolved, That Matthew Lyon, a member of this House, for a violent attack and gross indecency, committed upon the person of Roger Griswold, another member, in the presence of the House while sitting, be for this disorderly behavior expelled therefrom (University of Chicago, 2000).

As it turns out Lyon survived the dismissal resolution largely because the vote was split straight down party lines.¹ During the debate before the vote the discussion centered not on the question of whether Lyon’s actions were appropriate or not but rather over whether or not Lyon should have behaved such a way in the House itself. Key to this debate was whether or not the House was actually in session or not. Many Representatives noted that the Speaker of the House was not presiding at the time and thus the house was not technically in session when Lyon spat at Griswold.

This brings up an important point which should be emphasized: the Representatives themselves noted that members should behave differently than average citizens particularly when the House is in session. Representative Albert Gallatin of Pennsylvania put it this way: “This was not then one of those cases which discovered a corruption of heart that would disqualify a man from giving a vote on a legislative subject, though it might show the person to be disqualified for polite society” (University of Chicago, 2000). Gallatin, like many of his Republican colleagues, concluded that Lyon should not be dismissed because if that was done then the people of Connecticut would be forced to go without a Representative and that would

¹ During the debate Lyon riled up the Federalists even more by emphatically stating that “his political enemies [were] kicking [him] in the arse” In response an angry Federalist replied “The member from Vermont made us of an expression so outrageous, so gross and indecent, that no gentleman yet [has] been able to repeat it” (Neff, 1999). Thus not even the debate was held in a civil manner.

not be just. That being said however, Gallitin still believed that Lyon's behavior was inappropriate for the chambers of the House. He concluded that "all must agree in reprobating the mode [Lyon] selected to show his resentment, and the place where the act was committed" (Neff, 1999). Thus, even while the House let Lyon off the hook it was generally agreed by all that the decorum standard set for a Representative, or for a Senator for that matter, is higher than the acceptable standard of civility for the average population. Once an individual steps into his or her role as Representative of the American people s/he is expected to behave appropriately. The House took note of this important fact during the debate over Lyon's dismissal.

The House Committee of the Whole may have voted in favor of Lyon but that was by no means the end of the story. The brief spat between Lyon and Griswold on January 30th merely set the stage for the all out brawl which was to occur on February 15th.

In the morning that day Lyon was busy at his desk in the Chamber completing some paper work. He was completely unaware of the fact that Griswold, perhaps angry that the dismissal resolution had failed, was quickly approaching him from behind. George Thatcher, Representative of Massachusetts, witnessed the entire event:

"I was suddenly and unsuspectedly interrupted by the sound of a violent blow I raised my head, and directly before me stood Mr. Griswold [sic] saying on blows with all his might upon Mr. Lyon, who, seemed to be in the act of rising out of his seat. Lyon made an attempt to catch his cane, but failed—he pressed towards Griswold and endeavored to close with him, but Griswold fell back and continued his blows on the head, shoulder, and arms of Lyon [who] protecting his head and face as well as he could then turned and made for the fire place and took up the [fire] tongs. Griswold drop[p]ed his stick and seized the tongs with one hand, and the collar of Lyon by the other, in which position they struggled for an instant when Griswold trip[p]ed Lyon and threw him on the floor and gave him one or two blows in the face." (Neff, 1999)

After all this the two men were finally separated by their colleagues. That was however, Neff records, not the end of it: “Lyon retreated to the House water tables; when Griswold re-approached him, Lyon lunged forward with the fire tongs and initiated a second brawl.” The two fighting men were then separated once more and subsequent dismissal resolutions were drawn up yet again. Yet even after this brazenly physical assault neither Lyon nor Griswold were dismissed. Party politics saved them both.

Party politics may have saved the political careers of both men but both men certainly created a whole new level of partisanship between the Republicans and the Federalists. To be sure the parties were not best of friends before the incident. The brawl however was like fuel to the fire. Both parties used the incident as an excuse to blast each other and their attitudes and behavior was reflected and commented on by the press and general public. Neff writes that “One newspaper commented on the hype and partisan frenzy by musing that Lyon had ‘ejected his saliva’ explicitly as ‘an infallible cure for the lock-jaw,’ because ‘ever since the memorable day of spittle, the House and the public have been talking about it’”. Both sides were talking about the issue because they both wanted to damage the opposing party. The overall behavior of the House was aptly summed up by Representative Edward Livingston. He remarked that the members spoke of “their abhorrence of abuse in abusive terms and their hatred on indecent acts with indecency” (Neff, 1999).

What followed thus was perhaps one of the most uncivil periods of American legislative history. This incivility poured out from the legislature and spread quickly through the press and general public. A brief example from the press is that of a poem which was found in the Federalist paper, *The Porcupine Gazette*, which was printed out of Philadelphia. The poem read as follows:

“Not Hudibrass’ Steel so Trusty
 Which lack of fighting has made rusty,
 Nor yet la Mancha’s sword so bright
 Kept by the watching, valourous Knight
 Nor any Sword e’er girded thigh on
 Can match this Matchless Sword of Lyon”
 (Neff, 1999)

Another poem printed in the press also reveals how the incivility of Congress spread to the press:
 The poem was written after the dismissal vote failed:

In sympathy [Lyon’s] friends drew near
 And kept its foes at bay
 For every beast, has friends, ‘tis clear
 As every dog, his day”

This poem then continued with a conclusion which stated that the “creature” had created “a filthy Lyon’s den” out of Congress (Neff, 1999). These two poems show how the press quickly jumped onboard the incivility bandwagon and attempted to use the incident in order to bash their political enemies and garnish support for their own party.

Sadly enough the incivility did not stop with the press. It spread all the way to the people. One citizen wrote an editorial to a newspaper which called for the creation of the “knights of the wooden sword”. Members of this organization, the author mused would be “partisans of indecency” who use their “superb dagger of lath” in retaliation to any offense (Neff, 1999). Yet another example is that of a poem written by ‘An American Youth’. This poem was written to the tune of Yankee Doodle Dandy and covered the entire incident. The poem was titled “The Spunkaid or Heroism Improved: A Congressional Display of Spit and Cudgel” (Neff, 1999).

This high level of incivility had a very detrimental effect on how the public at large viewed American government. Public awareness of incivility, in the words of one citizen of the time, “deeply wounded and degraded [...] the honor of congress [...] at home and abroad (Neff, 1999). This sentiment was echoed by another citizen who wrote to the Connecticut Gazette with the conclusion that “the polished nations of the earth [loaded the American] government with contempt and hissing” (Neff, 1999). The act of incivility by both Lyon and Griswold thus eventually led to loss of respect in the eyes of not only American citizens but also in the eyes of other world governments.

Yet, it was not merely the fact that uncivil men behaved inappropriately in the House chamber which irked most people. What got underneath the skin of the citizenry was the fact that the behavior went unchecked and thus the entire institution had, in a way, tacitly supported their actions. This was the fear of John Madison. Madison had written to Jefferson before the outcome of the dismissal vote saying that he was “curious to see how the zealots for expelling Lyon will treat the deliberate riot of Griswold.” He continued stating his concern that

“The whole affair has been extremely disgraceful, but the dignity of the body will be wounded, not by the misconduct individual members, which no public body ought to be answerable for, but for the misconduct of itself, that is, of a majority; and it is to be feared that the majority in this case are ready for every sacrifice to the spirit of party which infatuates them” (Neff, 1999)

A witness to the failed dismissal vote proved that Madison’s fear had become reality. The witness stated that “If the minority had possessed sufficient spirits to raise their hanging heads and downcast eyes [they would have seen] contempt and indignation depicted in every feature of men feeling the tormenting disgrace now indelibly attached to the name of their country” (Neff, 1999).

Thus in the end it was not the simple act of incivility by Lyon or Griswold which mattered, it how the institution responded. The institution failed to rebuke the men and also failed to depart from their uncivil attitude it rather took up the attitude of incivility and spread its influence far beyond that of a mere act. The unfortunate result of such behavior is summed up by Neff

“Not only did Lyon and Griswold disgrace themselves with their congressional scuffle, but in the eyes of many, they tarnished the respectability of the United States as a whole. The failure of the republican experiment at the hands of factions, particularly in front of a watching world, was perhaps America’s worst nightmare. The affair between Lyon and Griswold led many citizens to doubt their fledgling government’s stability by inducing in them a fear that this nightmare would in fact become a reality that political parties would indeed destroy their republic.”

This single example of the incivility of Lyon and Griswold thus had immense implications upon their entire legislative system and indeed upon the entire federal government.

Congressional Civility _____ Lessons from Lyon v. Griswold

With the history now behind us what lessons can be learned from the Lyon vs. Griswold incident? There are at very least four lessons which can be taken from this historical example.

First, the act of incivility and the subsequent attitude of incivility were caused by humans not by conflict itself or by a particularly volatile issue. At the heart of the original uncivil act were two uncivil men. Yes, it is true that both men sat on opposite sides of the aisle and were members of two very partisan parties. Yet, in the words of Aaron Burr (said to Alexander Hamilton before their duel in 1804), “political opposition can never absolve Gentlemen from the necessity of a rigid adherence to the laws of honor and the rules of decorum” (Neff, 1999). Thus political membership alone does not have to cause incivility.

Historian Neff goes to great lengths in his article, *Fracas in Congress: The Battle of Honor between Matthew Lyon and Roger Griswold*, to reveal just how important rules of honor, decorum and civility were back in the day of the founding fathers. Even opposition party leaders were expected to lead in a civil manner which respected the honor code. In the case of Lyon vs. Griswold the honor code broke down and thus a huge eruption of incivility resulted. Why did the code break down? It was not because of the issue differences between the men. The code broke down because the men attacked each others honor. Lyon attacked Griswold’s legislative and electoral viability and Griswold attacked back spreading the word about Lyon’s dishonorable discharge. The conflict thus started with two men who were unable to uphold the honor code. The lesson: Civility is absolutely essential: If America elects wo/men who are unable to maintain civility and respect while fighting a controversial issue then progress will never be made through our legislative process.

The second lesson quickly follows from the first: Congressional members (including Senate members), must at the very least, learn to be civil and cordial even while dealing with his or her political enemy and thus they must rise to a higher level of civility than that which is all too often the case with the general public. This is a rule which both the Republicans and the Federalists, in the case above, admitted to even if they failed to adhere to it.

It is important to note that this rule does not, however, say that a member of congress cannot or should not defend his or her honor when wrongfully attacked. Neff, for instance believes that Lyon would have been commended if he had responded to Griswold's comment by verbally replying saying "Mr. Griswold, the weapon to which you allude, was unjustly decreed to me. But whether just, or otherwise, you neither, manifest delicacy, or true courage, by throwing it up to me in this place". Thus the demand for civility does not require that members become spineless and weak kneed. On the contrary the rule allows for defense, and even attacks, provided they are done in a truthful and honorable fashion.

The third lesson is that the integrity of Congress as a whole must be maintained even when one or two members act uncivilly. In the example of Lyon vs. Griswold the nation was not disgusted by the simple fact the two members acted inappropriately. That one or two members of Congress might retreat into incivility is, unfortunately, expected by the citizenry. What is not expected is for those uncivil members and their actions to be safeguarded and defended by the overall body.

In addition, not only is the institution tainted in reputation it is also prevented from acting efficiently and effectively. In the case in question Congress became wrapped with debate and discussion, over how to deal with the issue, for many weeks afterward. James Madison recorded his disgust with this situation in a letter addressed to Thomas Jefferson. He wrote that "the affair

of Lyon and Griswold [was] bad enough in every way, but worst of all in becoming a topic of tedious disgraceful debates in Congress” (Neff, 1999). It is easy to see thus, as Madison emphasizes, how careless partisan and uncivil debate can “disgrace” Congress. That is the third lesson which can be gleamed from the grime of Lyon vs. Griswold: the incivility of a few members can quickly spread and tarnish the legitimacy of the whole government thereby preventing its function.

This leads to the fourth lesson: if an uncivil act in Congress is allowed to fester without reproach or condemnation than the act of incivility will spiral into an overall attitude of incivility throughout the nation which will be very difficult to change. The progression is simple: If not stopped immediately the attitude of incivility swiftly takes advantage of existing partisanship within Congress and soon it cannot be maintained within the walls of the Capitol. It quickly spreads to the press and then to the public via the press. The public, which is already held to a much lower standard of civility, spreads the uncivil attitude like wildfire and thus the attitude which may have begun with just a few member of Congress has now snuck into the heart of the average American citizen. This uncivil citizen then goes out and gets involved in politics and votes in new members who share his attitude. This cycle could easily go on and on. to see how the problem continues to compound upon itself. The clear lesson: incivility will spread like wildfire it is not quickly condemned and stopped.

Congressional Civility_____ Continuation of Incivility in Recent History

The Lyon vs. Griswold case, along with the many other cases mentioned previously, drives home the point that incivility is caused not by mere conflict itself but by uncivil personalities. Now that this point has been sufficiently made it is appropriate to move our discussion of incivility into the current day and age. This discussion quickly reveals the unfortunate reality that the blatant incivility of the past is still amongst us even today.

It is not very common now to hear of acts of physical aggression made by one political figure to another. Thus in some ways it might be argued that we as a nation have progressed forward to a more civil system of governance. That said however, there are plenty authors and writers who claim that civility in the nation's capital has reached an all time low. Why is this? Outright physical aggression may have gone down but political and personal fighting between members continues to happen on a regular basis. The root cause of incivility, selfish power-seeking behavior, thus continues to be at heart of today's political and personal attacks.

Power still reigns supreme and thus not much has changed from the physically violent days of the 1800. Take for instance an incident which took place over the summer of 1985:

“As members of one party were accusing the other of “shortcounting” votes in procedural matters, a livid House Majority Leader...stepped down from the rostrum and confronted the two them.’ That leader, ‘a former Golden Glove boxer, threatened to punch’ two members of the other party in the mouth. Although he later apologized, ‘hard feelings from the incident lasted until after the recess and led to a near fistfight’ between a Democratic and Republican member, ‘who shouted epithets at each other from across the aisle’” (Jamieson and Falk, 2000).

In this incident we see how one member, the Majority Leader, responded to other members who questioned his authority (by means of claiming he was ‘shortcounting’ votes) in a near violent

manner. Once the conflict had been created by this hostile reaction, the House Majority Leader chose to deal with the situation through uncivil means rather than through the civilly accepted channels of appropriate parliamentary inquiry. The root of the conflict therefore lay in the selfish desire to maintain and keep power.

Moving closer now towards the current day we still can find historical instances where verbal incivility nearly turned violent. For instance, in 1989 “two members ‘got into a shoving match that nearly escalated’ before another member ‘broke it up’”. Also, in 1996 a ranking member of a certain committee became so frustrated that he “threw a handful of papers in front of the committee chair from the other party, ‘stalked out of the committee room and yanked on the necktie’ of another member of the majority”. In another 1996 incident the Capitol Police was quickly called after a member “administered a stiff shove” to another member (Jamieson and Falk, 2000).

These latter incidents which occurred in 1996 took place just after what is now recorded as the most recent historical spike in general incivility that Congress has seen. The immediate reaction, in this circumstance, is to blame the spike of incivility on the partisan atmosphere which resulted from the Gingrich Revolution of 1994. Yet to blame partisan politics alone would be inaccurate. Indeed the two examples of incivility given above did not occur between members of opposing parties but rather between two members of the same party. Recent incivility thus cannot be explained away by the mere acknowledgement of extremely partisan politics.

Kathleen Hall Jamieson and Erika Falk, in their article entitled, *Continuity and Change in Civility in the House*, provide four specific reasons as to why incivility followed the Republican takeover in the 104th Congress. The reasons they gave are as follows:

1. The Change in Party Control
2. The increasing ideological polarization between the parties.
3. The Democrats' loss of agenda control
4. The Republican's difficulty in adjusting to majority status

Two of these reasons deal with party control and party polarization. Clearly thus partisan politics has a strong influence in incivility. In a sense, however, the political polarization reasoning is not a legitimate explanation for the rise in incivility because political polarization is a natural phenomenon which is bound to occur in any democracy where the views of the general public are not in constant alignment. This being the case then it is evident that the political power frustrations were the real cause of the rise incivility. Congress could not do much about its ideological makeup or which party was in control. Once the election was decided the makeup and ideological rifts of Congress were decided. Nothing could be done to change that fact. Where Congress could have acted though was in how its members responded to the shift in power. Unfortunately however the spike of incivility in the first year of the 104th Congress reveal that many political leaders chose to act inappropriately and selfishly rather than in a selfless manner which would have promoted overall legislative progress.

Congressional Civility_____Incivility and Politics

It is here that an important distinction should be made. Civil behavior by definition does not mean weakness or that you cannot or should not stick to your beliefs. A problem which often arises is that members of one party will accuse the other party of acting uncivilly merely because the other party is not preventing the first party to have their way. This is what the Democrats did when the Republicans had both the Senate and the House in their power. The Republicans are now doing the very same thing. Civility doesn't mean that the opposition always has to let you have your own way. Indeed if that was what civility meant than nothing could ever be done through civil means. No, civility does not mean giving in to your political opponents. It merely means rather that the political actors respect each other enough to play the political game within the rules set down in the very beginning of the legislative session.

The Constitution gives Congress the power to govern itself. Congress thus, in on April 7, 1989, wrote its own rules of decorum. With the advent of each new Congress these general rules of decorum are changed and modified with the intention of defining civil behavior more clearly. These rules have played an important part in diffusing incivility because, in the words of Walter Oleszek, they "provide stability, legitimize decisions, divide responsibilities, reduce conflict, and distribute power (qtd. in Jamieson and Falk, 2000). What these rules do than is set up a civil manner in which conflict can be resolved.

There is no legitimate reason then for personalities to rage angrily at each other. Congress is not the forum for personal disputes and battles. It is rather the avenue through which politically passionate individuals can come together to hammer out their differences through a legitimate legislative process where the progress of the American nation is at the heart of all parties.

All too often however members of Congress simply do not have this benign goal in mind. The skeptical position is that members of Congress are there merely to brazenly exercise their own power and push their own selfish agendas.

Congressional Civility_____Incivility Today

Allow me to provide recent examples, within this last year, just in case any lingering doubt exist in terms of the whether or not this conclusion (that incivility still permeate throughout our governing officials) holds true even in this new millennium. Many people looked forward to positive change as our nation moved into the year 2000. Yet while all parties have verbally stated their approval and support for civility the record proves that in reality civility has declined rather than improved. Representative Ray LaHood (R-Ill) put it this way, “I had high hopes for Bush. We were on the high road then, but now I think we’ve hit an all time low” (Milbank and Broder, 2004). Incivility thus, despite our best efforts, continues to rise up even in our current legislature.

LaHood was speaking more in terms of the interaction between the President to Congress but the same is true today for the Legislative Branch as a whole. Indeed, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid claimed that he would do all he could to increase, improve and uphold a culture of civility in their respective chambers. Just after the election which swept Democrats into power Reid told reporters that he “look[s] forward to working with Senator McConnll to establish a new tone and to produce real results next year...we won’t always agree, but [we] can sit down, side by side and forge consensus on the issues important to the American people.” Senate Minority Leader McConnell replied “Republicans intend to be as cooperative as possible to help the Senate off to a good start next year” (AP, 2006). So all was well and good...Surprisingly, however, everything did not end up so happily ever after.

Numerous documentations of incivility have already been recorded in this current session. One case, by way of example, is that which occurred after scathing debate over an Iraq war amendment. The bitter partisan bickering which resulted from the amendment and

subsequent actions caused Senator Trent Lott to state abruptly that “the Senate is spiraling into the ground to a degree that I have never seen before, and I’ve been here a long time” (Pierce and Billings, 2007). “The last vestiges of courtesy seem to be going out the window,” he continued, “Every time you think the Senate, Republican or Democrat – has gone any lower, we go lower. (Hulse, 2007).

Things have not been much different over in the House of Representatives. Speaker Nancy Pelosi, like Harry Reid, stated after her election to the position of Speaker that she would work to reach across the aisle in a civil manner. She stated in her speech which opened the 110th Congressional session saying that “I accept this gavel in the spirit of partnership, not partisanship, and look forward to working with you on behalf of the American people” (Fox News, 04 January 2007). This general spirit was accepted verbally by both Republicans and Democrats alike.

Lo and behold however the spirit did not last long. A quick look at a breakdown in relations which took place in early August provides a momentary glance at the lack of civility which survived through the spring and summer. On August 2nd the Republican Party walked out of Congress over what they considered to be the stealing of a crucial vote effecting immigration. “In one telling instant” Minority Leader John Boehner of Ohio said, “the Democratic majority revealed it is willing to break any rule, trample on any precedent, and run roughshod over its own members to defend a left wing, big government agenda most Americans utterly reject” (Kucinich, 2007). Republicans who reacted on the floor, however, were not as kind as Boehner. The Congressional Quarterly, for instance, records that Republicans were yelling out “Shame! Shame!” while Representative Patrick McHenry of North Carolina, “thumped the back of a chair in rhythm with the chant” and while Representative Steven C. LaTourette of Ohio “repeatedly

covered his mouth with his hand, pretending to cough and bellow a barnyard epithet” (Allen, 3 August, 2007). All of this commotion resulted in an apology from the Democrats yet even though Majority Leader Steny Hoyer apologized the vote was still upheld and no further action was taken other than to refer entire matter to committee for review.

What both of these cases from the House and Senate reveal is a continuing lack of civility which permeates through both institutions even today. To be sure no one is being bludgeoned or caned as in the days of old yet the absence of direct physical violence by no means that the goal of civility has been achieved. In fact there are many who are concerned that civility today is reaching an all time low. Allow me to give one more illustration to drive this point home. This example reveals a disturbing new reality which the Congress must now face.

Congressional Civility_____The New face of Incivility

Incivility has now been escalated away from the Senate and House chambers and into the streaming waves of cyberspace. A mistakenly sent email out of Senator Tom Coburn's office boldly proclaimed that a new bit of dirt discovered about Senator Ben Nelson would "shut that f---er up". The email continued stating that "I can't wait to send an In Case You Missed It to Nebraska press that will be forwarded to a—face." The email was met with enthusiasm from within Coburn's office as a recipient of the email replied joking that "media calls should be directed to Nelson's hairdresser and his 'son's probation officer'" (Retter, 2007). To be clear, these emails were not sent by Senator Coburn himself but regardless they demonstrate a disturbing trend now becoming apparent; Senators and Representatives may appear to be civil at first glance. Upon deeper inspection however it is evident that all too often their very own supporters and staffers are viciously attacking each other behind the scenes via the internet.

Journalist Daphne Retter explains:

"House and Senate staffer say that the e-mails are also a natural extension of the kind of aggressive strategy that many believe is necessary to keep their bosses afloat in a partisan atmosphere as cutthroat as ever. The glimpse of intra-office banter puts on display the fact that the loss of comity in the Senate, frequently mounted by congressional observers and lawmakers themselves, more often than not begins among the unelected – staffers who are rewarded for protecting and defending their bosses with everything they've got" (Retter, 2007).

Thus what once was fought out with fists, canes and fire prongs is now being fought out over the internet. This only reinforces the sad fact that while Washington's really is not changed. The mud, which frequently was the streets 200 years ago, still lays fresh underneath the sleek modern asphalt.

Congressional Civility _____ **Conclusion**

This essay began with a detailed discussion on why civility is so important to American government. The conclusion reached was that without civility our entire system is without credibility and thus the ability to perform is extremely limited. This sore fact does not go unnoticed by the American people or by her leaders. Indeed, the Congressional record for the Senate on July 25, 2007 records Senator Cornyn's lamentations on this subject. His overall conclusion was that "The Senate has gotten to a bad place, not only in the eyes of the American people, where 16 percent [...] believe the Senate is doing a good job."

Senator Cornyn's observation is all too true. When incivility reigns supreme in Congress public support for Congress diminishes rapidly. And when public support for government dissipates our democratic system fails; when there is no consent by which to govern there is no legitimate government. Civility therefore is crucial.

Yet while this fact is nearly universally recognized incivility still rears its ugly head in every historical age. Why? Because as Abraham Lincoln put it there are individuals in throughout the nation and indeed throughout the world who belong to "the family of the lion or the tribe of the eagle". It is these overly ambitious people who threaten the peace of our civil government because they are never content with the position they are currently in. They must progress and gain glory and honor for themselves. Lincoln defines them those who deny "that it is glory enough to serve under any chief." Serving others is not good enough for these people. No, these people will not settle for servant leadership they must have things their way. They must rule like kings stomping over whatever opposition might come their way.

The brief history provided in this paper reveals a few of these characters: Lyon, Griswold, Sumner and many others. These men attempted to resolve conflict through uncivil means which served no one but their own selves and their own honor. They acted thus out of selfish desire not out of selflessness. It is fair to assert then that our government will continue to harbor elements of incivility as long as any member leads out of selfish ambition rather than selflessness. What America must do then, as she has attempted to do for many years past, is develop an attitude of selflessness in its citizenry and also in her leadership.

Lincoln wrote that the only defense America has against the family of the lion and the tribe of the eagle is to have “every American, every lover of liberty, every well wisher of posterity, swear by the blood of the Revolution, never to violate in the least particular, the laws of the country; and never to tolerate their violation by others.” Lincoln’s solution thus was submission to the rule of law by everyone, citizens and leaders alike. This submission to law is directly relevant to our discussion because submission to law is by its very nature selfless. A selfish leader will not care for the law and if the law prevents his own advance he is quick to selfishly brush it aside.

Lincoln therefore urged America to see it as her sacred duty to educate and spread the political religion which was the rule of law. “Let reverence for the laws,” he boldly stated, “be breathed by every American mother, to the lisping babe, that prattles on her lap-let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges; - let it be written in Primmers, spelling books, and in Almanacs; - let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice.” I could not agree with Lincoln more. This education is vital if we as a nation are to eradicate incivility from amongst ourselves.

I would however make one addition to Lincoln's wisdom. That is that rule of law cannot be taught alone. It must be taught alongside the equally important doctrine of selflessness; love of ones neighbor. Without this supreme doctrine there is little accountability. Try as we might to hold our elected officials accountable by mere rule of law, as written by flawed human hands, incivility will still remain unless we also demand accountability to an unwavering ever-true doctrine of selflessness.

Yet this doctrine of selfishness is not merely defined by the platitude "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you". It is coupled with the all important doctrine of "Love the Lord your God with all your heart strength soul and mind". This is where the ultimate accountability lies; between ones conscience and the unwavering and true laws of an almighty God. Because God's laws are by their very nature true and perfect (for a God who is perfect cannot produce imperfect laws) they provide the final judgment on our behavior. Incivility thus will easily persist as it has throughout history as long as leaders hold themselves only accountable to man made rule of law. If however these same rulers held themselves to the higher standard of God's law, simply defined as "love your neighbor as yourself", then incivility would dramatically decline because an attitude of selflessness would pervade throughout the halls of our government.

Now that we have come this far I must, at the probable expense of losing the attention of many of my readers, persist on this line of thought merely long enough to say that adherence to a vague higher law of selflessness or submission to the rules and decrees of some vague concept called God is not enough. No, ultimate human selflessness cannot be obtained unless we learn from the only Being who was able to be the perfect example for us. That Being would be Christ Jesus himself.

I beg of my reader to continue to read on even if this last paragraph may seem too far out of today's excepted mainstream. What I am saying really is nothing new at all. Religious and secular folk alike have proclaimed Christ Jesus as the ultimate example for all of us to follow. Why have both secular and religious scholars proclaimed this? Because they recognize that Christ was the perfect example for our lives. Even if we refuse the divinity of Christ we easily accept the example of his perfect humanity. He is therefore, in both cases, the perfect standard for our nation to follow.

Thus, in short, if our Congressional leaders placed Christ (as mere man or as almighty God) as their model and example then sources of incivility would diminish quickly. That is not to say that we will all suddenly become perfect or to say that incivility will never again rise. Humans are by their very nature flawed and thus we are bound to make mistakes. Yet if we, flawed as we are, place Christ as our example than at least we are aspiring to a perfect goal; a goal which mere adherence to the rule of law or a vague doctrine of selflessness cannot achieve.

Finally, this conclusion that Christ as the ultimate example and thus our ultimate defense against incivility is not meant to break the all sacred separation of church and state mantra. Indeed the first amendment strictly forbids any official government declaration of belief in a specific religion. And this is all well and good for if the government twisted this advice and imposed an official religious mantra on the public then the power of individual choice would be eradicated. And if choice is eradicated so is the ability to give ones consent and this then, as revealed in the introduction of this essay, leads to a complete breakdown in civility. Clearly then institutionalized and official government sanction of religion is not what I am calling for. No, what I am attempting to argue is that if we as individuals make the free will choice to adhere to Christ's law of love and thus place his perfect example as our model then we as individuals

would act civilly to each other. And if we all as individuals are constantly acting in civil manner than Congress itself will become instantaneously a civil body.

This then is the very simple conclusion to this paper: civility, and hence the entire function of our government depends on two very simple rules; love the Lord your God (defined as the perfect example, Christ) and Love your neighbor as yourself. Curiously enough this thesis teaches the simple truth which any basic Sunday school lesson would have taught even the youngest child. Yet, if this is all that I have learned in 3.5 years I remain a very happy man for indeed the conclusion to this essay has shown that our entire system might easily be run through adherence to these two simple clauses.

Imagine the difference which could be made if only we as individuals would follow them as closely as we follow the many other competing mantras of our lives. If nothing else this is something which we as individuals, and we as a nation, must take into consideration. Indeed the very future of our government may depend on our decision as to whether or not this conclusion is valid.

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