

Voices of America

BY CHRISTOPHER SNOW HOPKINS

Federal lawmakers are the first to admit that Congress is a dysfunctional and despised institution. Its approval rating, according to a CNN poll released on the eve of the government shutdown, is 10 percent.

Given Congress's record, why not outsource decision-making to the American public?

Steven Kull, a senior research scholar at the University of Maryland's Center for International and Security Studies, has devised a new model that will allow the general public to engage in simulated decision-making. The "Campaign for a Citizen Cabinet" will be formally introduced Thursday by four former members of Congress—two Democrats and two Republicans—at the National Press Club in downtown Washington.

"It grew out of research that I've done interviewing people in focus groups and surveys," said Kull, founder and president of the nonprofit Voice of the People, which will oversee the campaign.

"What we've heard is a high level of frustration on the part of the American public about government and a perception that the government doesn't serve the common good, but instead special interests. It's stuck in gridlock, not finding common ground, and in a general way, it doesn't reflect the common sense of the American people."

The Citizen Cabinet, which brings together 120,000 online participants to weigh



Kull: "Voice" leader.

the most vexing public-policy issues of the day, is "scientifically selected to accurately reflect the American people," according to official materials. On any given issue, the Cabinet members will be presented with a menu of options, along with the pros and cons for each. "The information they get is vetted by staffers on both sides of the aisle, along with advocacy groups from both ends of the spectrum," Kull said.

The process is meant to insulate participants from the misinformation, ideology, and political calculations that typically grease the wheels of Washington dysfunction.

And it has the blessing of 14 former

members of Congress, who have agreed to sit on the initiative's advisory board. Four of them—former Sen. Byron Dorgan, D-N.D., and former Reps. Michael Castle, R-Del., Bill Frenzel, R-Minn., and Martin Frost, D-Texas—will be on hand for the unveiling Thursday.

Kull, 62, grew up in Palo Alto, Calif. His father worked at SRI International, an independent think tank with historic ties to Stanford University.

After studying psychology at the University of California (Santa Cruz), Kull earned a Ph.D. in psychology from Saybrook University, in San Francisco. He then returned to Palo Alto for postdoctoral work at Stanford, conducting hundreds of interviews with U.S. policymakers. "They were making lots of statements about public opinion that I knew were wrong," he said. "I wanted to know why."

Kull joined the University of Maryland faculty in 1990 and established the Center for International and Security Studies in 1992.

With the government shutdown, the debut of Citizen Cabinet is well-timed. "Constituent letters and phone calls have a disproportionate impact on a lawmaker's decision-making, given that it is not a representative sample of his constituency," Kull said. "Our program will give them reliable information on public opinion—and perhaps a hint on how to solve the nation's problems." ■

PEOPLE ROUNDUP

Group Is Buzzing

The Beekeeper Group, a Washington public-affairs firm, has added five staff members in communications and advocacy services in the health care and financial sectors.

The new additions include **Brad Rizza**, previously of Widmeyer Communications, as account director, and **Nick Walters**, from the digital firm Engage, as lead developer.

The others are **Jonathan Wilcox**, creative director, who comes to Washington from Michigan with a decade of experience in illustration and design; **Charles Pulliam-Moore**, videographer, who has produced and written for a number of media outlets; and **Lauren Fliegelman**, account coordinator, previously an intern at FasterCures, a medical-research think tank.

Food Monitor

John T. Allan III is the new vice president of regulatory affairs and international standards at the International Dairy Foods Association.

Allan's role includes leading the IDFA's efforts in food-safety training, product safety, quality-control issues, and regulatory affairs, the association said.

He was previously director of regulatory and international affairs for the National Yogurt Association and the American Frozen Food Institute, which includes the National Frozen Pizza Institute, the Frozen Potato Products Institute, and the Frozen Food Foundation.

Before that he worked for ASI Food Safety Consultants, the International Formula Council, and the Food and Agriculture Organiza-

tion of the United Nations.

Allan also has worked at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Diplomatic Fellow

Heidi Crebo-Rediker, former chief economist at the State Department, has joined the Council on Foreign Relations as a senior fellow. She has been a member of the council for 10 years.

In March 2012, Crebo-Rediker became the State Department's first chief economist responsible for foreign policy issues.

She previously was chief of international finance and economics for the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Earlier in her career, Crebo-Rediker spent nearly two decades in investment banking.

Mike Magner