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As Government Shuts Down, New Organization Unveils Bold Plan to Break Through Polarization and Gridlock

Voice of the People and its Campaign for a Citizen Cabinet Seek to Give Public a Seat at the Table

Washington DC – As the government shutdown continues, with Congress at an impasse, a new organization today unveiled its plan for breaking through the persistent polarization and gridlock that plagues Washington, DC. Voice Of the People (VOP) and its Campaign for a Citizen Cabinet seek to give the public a seat at the table when government decisions are being made.

Most Americans believe, as did the nation’s Founders, that the common sense of the people can help break through polarization and gridlock, find common ground and lead to government that better serves the common good.

An abundance of research says they are right. The American people are far less polarized than Congress and more apt to find common ground. When given correct information, the public as a whole shows remarkable intelligence. And, the research shows, most people think about what serves the common good, not just what’s in their own interest.

“But the systems now in place to give the people a voice in government are inadequate and the American people know it. Calls and letters are not reliable indicators of public opinion and standard polls are too often based on off-the-cuff responses or misinformation,” said Dr. Steven Kull, Founder and President of Voice of the People. “Something new is needed.”

At its unveiling today in Washington, D.C, bipartisan leaders of the organization, including four former Members of Congress, kicked-off a campaign to establish a national “Citizen Cabinet” – a large nationwide panel comprised of a representative sample of Americans who would weigh in on the difficult decisions faced by Congress.

Unlike traditional citizen advisory boards made up of appointees, Citizen Cabinet members would be a scientifically selected, representative sample of the entire citizenry. At least 275 people in every congressional district would be asked to serve – with 120,000 nationwide -- operating through an online interface. Citizen Cabinet members would be taken through the same process policymakers go through — they would be briefed on an issue, weigh competing arguments, and ultimately make the difficult choices. All materials presented to the Citizen Cabinet—the briefing, competing arguments, and policy options—will be vetted by a bipartisan group of experts and available online for anyone to see.

Finally, the results would be broken down by state and congressional district and provided to Congress, the President, and broadly communicated to the media and the public.

“I strongly believe that Congress needs to hear the ‘voice of the people’ if we are to get beyond gridlock and move our nation forward. A Citizen Cabinet will give the people a greater voice, provide Members of Congress a far more accurate sense of those they represent, help counter special interests and cut through the gridlock that has shut down our government,” said former U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND).

While members of the Citizen Cabinet would be scientifically selected to be a representative sample of the public, VOP seeks to give *all* Americans the opportunity to use these same online interactive tools--getting briefed, weighing competing arguments and coming to conclusions on key policy options. Citizens will be able to better engage and make more effective recommendations to their representatives, as their input will be more informed and focused on the actual policy choices and tradeoffs Congress is facing.

“I think the tone of our national discourse would be more civil and constructive if we had the Citizen Cabinet in place. The Citizen Cabinet will help the ‘calm and deliberate sense of the community’-- the one Alexander Hamilton talked about -- play a larger role in government decisions and help bring about ‘the more perfect union’ envisioned by our Founders,” said former Governor and U.S. Representative Michael Castle (R-DE).

Former U.S. Representative Martin Frost (D-TX) said, “The Citizen Cabinet is a win-win for the American people and Congress. This is an opportunity for policymakers to consult the public, show they are in touch with the concerns of their constituents, and give the public a greater say in the decisions of their leaders.”

Former U.S. Representative William Frenzel (R-MN) said, “The Founders clearly trusted the people, as I do. I believe our country would be better off if Congress tapped the common sense of the people on a more regular basis by establishing a Citizen Cabinet.”

Americans can learn more about how a Citizen Cabinet will work, and get involved in the campaign to bring the voice of the people to the table by visiting VOP’s website (www.VOP.org). The organization is encouraging all Americans to join the call and urge their Members of Congress to establish a Citizen Cabinet.

While VOP works to get Congress to formally establish a national Citizen Cabinet, the organization plans to create interim Citizen Cabinets in a limited number of Congressional Districts and states across the political spectrum, which will address a series of topics that Congress is facing.

VOP’s Advisory Board includes twelve former Members of Congress from both sides of the aisle, as well as other former federal and state government officials. It also includes leading public opinion researchers, business leaders, academics and scholars, including a Nobel laureate.

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