



**Office of the Mayor
City of Los Angeles**

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**Remarks at the
Ceasefire! Bridging the Political Divide Conference
as prepared for delivery
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Thank you, Mayor Bloomberg!

Ladies and gentlemen,

I want you to know that when I first learned about the opportunity to stand with the Republican Mayor of New York co-hosting a symposium on the problem of partisan polarization, I wanted to run right out and give a speech about it that very day.

This is a story I know from experience.

You see, I was first elected to the California State Assembly in 1994.

It was the same year the Democrats lost the House and Senate nationally, and our majority in the State Assembly was washed out in the tidal wave.

When the new session opened, there was a long and bitter fight for control. And after many months of maneuvering, the Republicans finally claimed the Speakership.

I remember that one of the things that happened during this period is we rearranged the seating and segregated the members by party.

It may seem like a small thing, but it transformed our house.

It felt like we went from being a body to a set of opposing camps.

So, when I became Speaker in 1998, I shuffled the seats and asked Democrats to start sitting next to Republicans again.

Some of my members complained at first, and I wondered whether I was doing the right thing. I wondered how Shiela Kuehl, my progressive lesbian colleague who represented Santa Monica and Malibu, must have felt about being seated next to a Christian conservative who probably thought her soul was in eternal danger.

But together we got some things done.

We passed the largest school bond in state history.

We enacted the nation's toughest assault weapon's ban.

We created the largest urban neighborhood parks initiative in America.

We extended healthcare to half a million California children.

More than any single legislative act or accomplishment, our House felt like more of a community than it had before.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe that the subject of this symposium really boils down to one question.

It's the question of how to restore our sense of shared purpose... our sense of national community.

Believe me, it is an easier question to ask than to answer.

Over the last decade we've witnessed a deepening distrust and a coarsening of the discourse in our country more poisonous than at any time since the years following the Civil War.

Sometimes Democrats and Republicans behave like we're not even on the same side anymore.

One of our highest officials creates a minor international incident when he is overheard profaning a member of United States Senate on the floor of our highest legislative body.

A respected leader of the minority party holds a press conference to apologize for comparing the policies of this administration to those of the worst totalitarian regimes of the 20th Century.

A conservative pundit writes a best-seller about the Democrats. She calls the book "Treason."

And this behavior is encouraged and enflamed by a news media that accelerates the cycle and amplifies the worst words.

More and more Americans are tempted to tune out.

Why bother when our national debates follow such a cynical and shallow shorthand:

Who “favors amnesty?”

Who “supports the troops?”

In a 24-hour news cycle where the story is driven by conflict, we find ourselves focusing on small differences rather big commonalities and shared challenges.

Insults pose as insights. Meanness masquerades as meaning.

And then there is the question of the condition of our political parties.

Facts are facts.

The last thirty years has witnessed the growth of a powerful libertarian wing in the Republican Party. Government is no longer accepted as the hands and feet of community. It is viewed as a "beast" to be "starved."

We Democrats, meanwhile, too often find ourselves defending old programs rather than promoting new ideas. The radicalism of the right finds a comfortable balance in the reluctance of the left.

In this landscape, it's sometimes difficult to say which of the two parties really is the conservative party today.

As a result we've seen a stupefying level of inaction on many of the most urgent issues facing our people...

from the spiraling cost of healthcare and plight of the 47 million uninsured...

to the crisis in our schools...

to the long term viability of social Security and Medicare...

to the urgent need to invest in energy independence and combat global warming...

to finding a fair and reasonable compromise on immigration reform...

to the addressing problem of poverty and the crisis facing America's middle class...

We are skirting the defining question in our country today. How do we keep the dream alive in an age of globalization?

Ladies and gentlemen: I believe it is time to take back the national debate.

It is time to insist that the political culture move beyond partisan polarization.

It's time for the media to begin resisting the inevitable race to the bottom.

We have to say this as Democrats and Republicans. As Americans.

And I say this as a proud progressive.

As a progressive, I know: Addressing the problem of partisan division is not simply a question of moving the country to the center.

It is about moving the debate back to the central questions.

Surveys show most Republican and Democratic voters fundamentally agree on many of our biggest challenges.

And yet it's the biggest issues that get lost in the political stalemates in Washington.

It's time to get to work. Every single day, local and state leaders are proving that the partisan divide is not so wide.

Governors and mayors across the country – Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Schwarzenegger among them – are demonstrating that it's not about ideology. It's about ideas.

While Washington drags its feet on confronting the gathering crisis of global warming, cities and states have been tackling the issue with determination.

Mayor Bloomberg has a bold plan to cut carbon emissions by 30% by 2030.

California's Republican Governor and Democratic Legislature are leading the way on climate change.

Here in LA we've set the most ambitious carbon reduction goal of a major American city: 35% by 2030.

State and local leaders are moving the needle on big issues because we are daring to think and dream big.

We're doing so across party lines. We're doing so by refusing to trim our expectations or to hedge our bets.

I'll tell you what we're doing here in Los Angeles: Over the last two years, we've taken the attitude that our future as a great global city depends on our willingness to face up to our biggest challenges.

Like generations of Angelenos before us – we are imagining a brighter future, and we are building it.

And I believe, like cities around the country, we're demonstrating that it's possible to create a different kind of government – one that is both fiscally responsible and socially progressive.

In two years we've shown that government can become more efficient while delivering the services residents expect.

We've balanced two budgets unanimously. We've cut our structural deficit by over 200 million. The balance of our savings account is up.

We've united the community behind the idea that environmentally sustainable growth is not a luxury, but a necessity.

We have doubled the use of clean, renewable energy. More than half of our city vehicles are now hybrids or run on alternative fuels. We are planting a million trees to green Los Angeles and clean the air. We are beginning to restore the Los Angeles River and reduce air pollution from the Port by 45% to protect public health.

We're facing our greatest public safety challenges as one city. We made an historic commitment in the most under-policed big city in America to hire 1,000 additional officers. As a result, our force is the biggest it's been in twelve years.

We're facing our status as the gang capital of the nation. We're going straight after the problem with a comprehensive gang reduction strategy. In just six months, gang-related homicides are down 32%.

We have lifted expectations, and we've changed the debate about public education in Los Angeles by organizing thousands of parents and advancing a policy framework for change.

Just last month, we elected a new reform majority on the LAUSD Board, and we are forging an historic partnership between the City and the District that that will bring fundamental reform to LA's neediest schools.

We've secured billions of dollars in transportation funding.

And we've joined with mayors around the country to create a national platform and action plan to address the central challenges of poverty, work and opportunity.

Ladies and gentlemen, I would submit to you that, now more than ever, the nation needs to look to its cities.

You see, the differences between our political parties coast to coast are nothing compared with diversity you will find within the city limits of Los Angeles...

Together we Angelenos come from 140 different countries. We speak at least 224 different languages.

And we are truly One City.

We know that our diversity of perspective is what gives us our competitive advantage.

It explains our strength.

It defines our vitality.

It's why we lead in the manufacture of culture.

It's explains our dominance in the production of ideas.

And it's why I am so optimistic that we can break cycle of partisanship in Washington.

Thank you so much for listening.

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