

COMMENTARY

The \$2 billion a day problem of polarization

BY SARAH BONK AND KARA REVEL JARZYNSKI
The Fulcrum

What do a sausage maker and an insurance giant have in common? A growing concern about the divisions fracturing American society — and a willingness to do something about it.

At Johnsonville, recent research with The Harris Poll found that 82% of Americans agree there’s too much outrage in the country and wish we could “turn down the temperature.” The company’s “Keep It Juicy” campaign, voiced by actor Vince Vaughn, encourages Americans to reclaim everyday joy and civility.

Meanwhile, Allstate, one of the nation’s largest insurers, has launched a three-year initiative with the Aspen Institute to strengthen trust in communities. Their message is clear: “Strong communities, businesses, and relationships are built on trust.”

These efforts reflect a broader trend: companies are no longer sitting on the sidelines while the social fabric

unravels. From brand campaigns to cross-sector partnerships, more business leaders are investing in solutions — in their workplaces as well as communities — to rebuild trust, civility, and social cohesion.

And there’s good reason to act. In a 2024 study, SHRM found that U.S. employers collectively lose more than \$2 billion each day due to lost productivity and absenteeism caused by toxic workplace behavior. These numbers reflect a larger national crisis: Americans are exhausted by division, and it’s showing up at the office, in customer interactions, and on company balance sheets.

While individual company initiatives are an important start, broader public solutions are also needed. One business-friendly response is the federal Building Civic Bridges Act (BCBA), which would support local initiatives that help Americans connect across differences and heal our social and political divides.

This bipartisan bill, recently reintroduced in the 119th Congress, has been endorsed by the U.S. Chamber of

Commerce, Business Roundtable, Indiana Chamber of Commerce, and U.S. Hispanic Business Council. Business for America has rallied support from well-known brands like Cummins, ECOS, REI Co-op, Salesforce, and Sierra Nevada Brewing Co. The legislation would fund research-backed, community-based programs that strengthen civic connections and teach skills like active listening, respectful dialogue, and conflict resolution.

When it comes to ROI for business, the BCBA would generate a ripple effect far beyond civic nonprofits. It could help address three growing challenges:

First, frontline workers are increasingly subjected to the emotional fallout of polarization. According to the Harvard Business Review in 2022, 78% of frontline employees and managers say abusive behavior from customers has increased in recent years. SHRM reports that U.S. workers collectively experience 171 million acts of incivility every day— leading to burnout, low morale, and turnover. Reducing societal hostility helps

protect employees and customer-facing operations alike.

Second, workplace culture itself is at risk. The political climate has seeped into our breakrooms and Slack channels. A 2024 SHRM survey found that 71% of U.S. workers report having polarizing, political, or controversial conversations at work and 87% of employers are concerned about managing divisive political beliefs. Left unaddressed, these rifts lead to toxicity, disengagement, and lost talent.

Third, division is not just bad for workplace dynamics — it’s a barrier to policy progress and economic growth. In a 2024 Gartner report, U.S. business leaders ranked political polarization as the second-highest emerging risk after generative AI. When Congress is gridlocked, the issues that matter to business — from workforce development to supply chains to climate resilience — stagnate. Bridging divides is not just a cultural issue; it’s a competitiveness issue.

Fortunately, Americans are ready for change. Nearly 80% say that, given the opportunity, they would help reduce

divisions in the country. What they need are the tools and spaces to do so. The Building Civic Bridges Act would provide just that.

Whether through ad campaigns, community partnerships, or public policy, business leaders have a role to play in restoring civility and trust. As Johnsonville suggests, it’s time to turn down the temperature. As Allstate reminds us, where there’s optimism, there’s opportunity. And as Congress considers the BCBA, we urge more business leaders to raise their voice in support. Because the future of business — and American prosperity — depends on it.

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AMERICAN OPINION

Rescission package two could be headed to Congress

LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

The Trump administration promised that the \$9 billion rescission package Congress passed this month on spending for foreign aid and government broadcasting would be the first of many. The White House is quickly looking to make good on that vow.

The Washington Post reported last Friday that President Donald Trump plans to include federal education spending in a second rescission bill. This is a fine place to burrow into the budget. The U.S. Department of Education is a monument to

ineffectiveness, doing little in its 45 years of existence to boost outcomes for American schoolchildren. Laundering local and state money through a federal education bureaucracy is hardly an efficient mechanism for improving the nation’s public schools.

Trump is operating under the 1974 Impoundment Control Act, which gives Congress the power to review executive branch decisions to withhold appropriated funding. If the House and Senate fail to rescind the money in question within 45 days, it must be distributed as intended.

The latest proposal is already stoking controversy among Democrats and

moderate Republicans in the Senate. Sen. Susan Collins, the Maine Republican who voted against the first “claw-back” bill, expressed her willingness to oppose additional legislation. “I don’t see the need for additional rescissions to be sent up by the White House,” Sen. Collins told the Post, arguing that the appropriations process would be the proper means to make any cuts.

Other Republicans worry that a second rescission bill will disrupt negotiations between the parties to avoid a government shutdown in coming months. “We’re trying to give (Democrats) what they’ve been asking for, which is a

bipartisan appropriations process,” Senate Majority Leader John Thune of South Dakota said last week.

That’s well and good, but why can’t the White House send Congress more potential cuts while Sen. Collins and friends work together to also identify potential budget reductions through a bipartisan appropriations process? The answer is that Democrats will never agree to any spending restraint. Witness their howls and apocalyptic rhetoric following the teeny-tiny budget cuts included in the recent legislation.

“The only time I have seen us reduce spending is through a rescission package,” Sen.

John Kennedy, a Republican from Louisiana, told the Post. “I’ll take a dozen of them.”

He has a point. If Senate Democrats want to shut down the government over largely symbolic shows of financial restraint, the consequences will be at their feet. The nation is \$37 trillion in debt. Americans understand that our current path is unsustainable. Republicans and the administration must keep demonstrating to voters that they’re willing to take even small steps toward fiscal sanity.

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Gabbard makes her own hoax with the rehashing of Russian interference

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

The unqualified director of national intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard, is again proving her unfitness by claiming that former President Barack Obama and his administration engaged in a “treasonous conspiracy” regarding the investigation of Russia’s interference in the 2016 presidential election.

In Gabbard’s retelling, based on some declassified materials, Obama and his administration worked to manufacture what the MAGA faithful have come to know as the “Russia hoax,” which is to say the reality that Vladimir Putin’s Russia endeavored to help Donald Trump in the 2016 election. Trump himself has now adopted this framing, referencing Obama’s “coup” and posting an AI-generated video of him

smiling as the former president is arrested and put in prison.

The documents show nothing of the sort, obviously. It’s particularly galling for Trump of all people to accuse a former president of attempting to orchestrate a coup when he’s the only U.S. president to have actually done so. Remember Jan. 6?

The question of whether Russia tried to influence the 2016 presidential election is not an unexamined one; it is perhaps one of the most deeply investigated issues in recent American political history, having been the subject of multiple congressional and Justice Department inquiries, which all established to some extent that Russia did, in fact, intervene. There was no hoax.

In any case, as with being

able to assert that Trump attempted a coup after the 2020 election by simply seeing it unfold on live TV with your own eyes, everyone witnessed the meddling during the 2016 election. Putin’s troll army and bots were all over the place, and were documented by entities beyond the federal government.

Gabbard is a well-known conspiracy herself, a known fan of Russian-aligned former Syrian despot Bashar Assad. Throughout her career in public life, she has repeatedly gravitated towards Russian talking points and propaganda, from downplaying Assad’s atrocities to opposing American assistance for Ukraine and questioning NATO. She was not qualified for her role when confirmed and we highly doubt she’s developed all the

necessary skills learning on the job.

This fiasco demonstrates that she’s understood her position not as being a serious analyst of the troves of information this government produces from the 18 organizations that make up the U.S. intelligence community, but a team player for Trump, a lesson that was no doubt reinforced when Trump publicly rebuked her assessment that Iran was not on the way towards developing nuclear weapons. Having seen what becomes of high-level officials who disagree with the king, she’ll put on whatever show Trump wants.

The timing of this whole affair could not possibly be more transparent. Trump can tell that for the first time since he entered public political life

a decade ago, he is at real risk of portions of his hardcore base slipping through his fingers as he flounders on the Epstein documents scandal. He has no credible explanation for why all of a sudden he can’t release the promised files or even acknowledge that they exist, and so is leaning on his minions to make the public conversation about anything else.

It’s not working; perhaps some subset of his base will buy the distractions, but for once there seems to be broad bipartisan agreement against him on Epstein. That doesn’t make distractions like this any less dangerous.

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on the top left side of the home page. Click on the “opinion” section, followed by the “letters” section and then click on “Letters to the editor and guest column guidelines.”

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— First Amendment of the United States Constitution

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