



**TESTIMONY OF THE HONORABLE RAY LAHOOD**  
**PROMOTING CIVILITY AND BUILDING A MORE COLLABORATIVE CONGRESS**  
**HOUSE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE MODERNIZATION OF CONGRESS**  
**SEPTEMBER 26, 2019**

Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chairman Graves and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you on the importance of civility and bipartisan collaboration in Congress.

I appear before you today as a former Member of Congress, serving 14 years in the House of Representatives from the 18th District of Illinois and as a former Congressional staff member for 17 years. I also served as Secretary of Transportation for 4 1/2 years in the Obama Administration. I am currently a Senior Policy Advisor at DLA Piper.

My memoir, *Seeking Bipartisanship My Life in Politics*, describes my efforts to restore civility in the House. Below are excerpts from the book that detail our experience.

**CHAPTER 4- CIVILITY IN RETREAT**

“Congress does not need to be—indeed should not be -a contest to see who can shout the loudest or who can throw the most accusations at the other party. We should rationally attempt to address, discuss, and solve problems on behalf of the citizens we represent.”

—Ray LaHood, 1998

**VANISHING COMITY IN THE HOUSE**

“By 1996, my second year in Congress, the image of the House of Representatives depicted in most textbooks as a place of reasoned debate, predictable processes, and restrained partisanship had simply disappeared. This came as no surprise to me. I had witnessed the coarsening of politics firsthand as chief of staff to Republican leader Bob Michel. His battles not only with Democrats but also with hard-edged Republicans led by Newt Gingrich warned of the decline in civility and comity that became evident to all in the 104th Congress.”

**PROPOSING THE FIRST CIVILITY RETREAT**

“But what could I, a freshman congressman, do about it? The answer came soon enough. David Skaggs, a Democrat from Colorado, approached me in June 1996 about co-organizing what he

called a "civility retreat" for House members. So began an assignment that I took on for the next eight years—leading efforts to change the culture of the House. By the end of my career there, I was more closely identified with the civility initiative than with any piece of legislation or formal committee assignment.”

## **CHAPTER 5- THE FIRST BIPARTISAN CIVILITY RETREAT**

### **A PRELIMINARY EVALUATION**

“At least by some standards, Hershey I improved the climate in the House. Research conducted later by Kathleen Hall Jamieson looked at a variety of indicators of incivility during House floor action. Her analysis of members' calling each other names or accusing one another of lying showed improvement in the tone of debate following the retreat. She also collected references to our work in the Congressional Record. She discovered that during contentious floor debates on the budget, health care, National Endowment for the Arts appropriations, Environmental Protection Agency policies, Social Security, and campaign finance reform, members reminded each other of their pledges in Hershey to maintain high standards for debate and personal interactions. Jamieson provided three specific examples:

#### Example 1

X: "I did not go to Hershey, PA at the bipartisan retreat, but if I had and would have come on the floor for this debate this evening, I do not believe I would have used words like `absurd,' mush,' things of that sort.... I do not think they help us."

Y: "If I said anything that is personal to the gentleman, I apologize. I was characterizing the ideas that are in debate."

X: "My good friend Y meant nothing personal toward me, nor did I take it as such."

#### Example 2

X: "The Chair would require all Members to be respectful of each other anywhere on the floor. Hershey was only 3 weeks ago."

#### Example 3

X: "The gentleman is doing real well for a new guy."

Y: "The gentleman is, too, and I like his hair in the spirit of Hershey and comity."

X: "I thank the gentleman."

Jamieson's conclusion: "By a number of measures the first session of the 105th sustained improvement in civility that had occurred in the last session of the 104th. In some respects, the first session of the 105th improved on its immediate predecessor."

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I commend you and the Committee for addressing this important topic. I look forward to answering the Committee's questions.