INTRODUCTION

Thank you Chairman Kilmer, Vice Chairman Timmons, members of the Select Committee, and to the staff and personnel who helped to make this important hearing, a possibility.

As a keynote speaker and consultant, I'm often asked why I choose to engage in the hard work of civility. There will always be mean and rude people. A drama-free and respectful committee hearing won't spread as quickly as a 15-second "gotcha" sound bite will travel on social media. As they say, nice guys finish last.

That's why when it comes to civility, I'm frequently asked, "What's the point?"

To me, that's like asking, "What's the point in showering? We're only going to get dirty again."

Similar to showering, civility is most effective when it is practiced consistently.

So, what is civility? Civility, in its simplest form, is a sincere and consistent demonstration of respect. Without a baseline of respect, there can be no trust. Without trust, communication among team members will deteriorate rapidly. Without respect, trust, and effective communication, committee meetings devolve into dysfunction, highly-skilled staff members quit, and most importantly, the American people who rely on this institution to improve their lives, will become disillusioned and lose faith in their elected officials.

On the other hand, people who consistently practice civility are not only viewed more positively by others and are more productive, but they're also more effective leaders as well.

In this hearing, I would like to share a recommendation on how Congress can use civility to create a more positive and productive institution that truly serves the American people.

RECOMMENDATION

It is my hope that every committee will consider beginning each new session of Congress by creating Civility Norms. To be clear, this is not a Code of Conduct. Traditionally, Codes of Conduct are created by the leaders of an organization, with the expectation that those within in the organization will follow the codes that they created.

Civility Norms, on the other hand, would be created BY the members of each committee FOR the members of each committee. This would ensure that each committee's norms would be specific to that committee's needs. For example, it is likely that Civility Norms created in the Ways and Means committee could be very different than the Civility Norms created in the Armed Services committee.

And that is exactly the point. Generic civility rules for large organizations (like the House of Representatives, for instance) rarely work in the long-term, due to their lack of specificity. In my experience, I have seen much greater commitment to actively practicing these norms when the members of a smaller group (i.e., a House Committee or subcommittee) play an active role in creating the norms. Additionally, there is a greater willingness to hold their peers accountable to those norms, because they agreed to them in the first place.

The process to create these norms is simple. Ideally, in a Committee's first organizational or planning meeting of the new Congress (which must be bipartisan), the members should answer two basic civility questions:

1) **What are the behaviors that demonstrate respect, and should be reinforced during each of our committee meetings?** Examples of this could be:
   a. Actively listening, and showing respect while others are talking
   b. Leading by example by modeling the respectful behaviors that you would like to see from others
   c. Disagreeing with an idea, without attacking the person who presented the idea
2) **What are the behaviors that do NOT demonstrate respect, and should not be tolerated during any of our committee meetings?** Examples of this could be:
   a. Making derogatory remarks about other Congresspeople during a meeting or on social media
   b. Disrespectful body language like eye-rolling while another member is speaking
   c. Intentionally ignoring another committee member

The answers to these two questions should be agreed upon by the committee members, recorded, and used as the Committee's Civility Norms going forward.

Additionally, each committee should also determine how they will incentivize behavior that promotes civility in the committee meetings. An example could be publicly posting a "Civility Score" on the committee's website or social media accounts for committee members who consistently adhere to the committee's norms.

CLOSING

Committing to this process may seem time-consuming, but couldn't the same be said about sitting in committee meetings where toxic conflict, incivility and dysfunction is the norm?

Civility is too important to be left to chance, that's why it needs a process. I am grateful to the Select Committee for ensuring that civility is given the attention and respect it deserves.

Thank you.