Pursuing Mosiah's and Madison's Commonsense Principle in Today's Divided Politics

Keith Allred

It is hard not to despair over the dysfunction in American politics today. The chaos created by the partisan rancor is continually before us. Angry tweets, bitter protests, and personal attacks are increasingly the norm, while civil discourse about sound policy is rare. No republic ever effectively managed its challenges this way.

The Commonsense Principle: Broad Support Indicates Wisdom

As is so often the case in turbulent times, the application of core principles can be a source of hope by providing practical guidance for how we can get to a better place. The contours of our current political crisis make a principle of good government found both in the Book of Mormon and at the heart of the Constitution more relevant than ever. The idea can be called the "Commonsense Principle," because it is based on one of the definitions of the term *common sense* as the "collective sense or judgment of humankind or of a community."[1]

Mosiah puts the Commonsense Principle at the center of his argument that government by the people is superior to government by kings. In Mosiah 29:26, he explains, "Now it is not common that the voice of the people desireth anything contrary to that which is right; but it is common for the lesser part of the people to desire that which is not right; therefore this shall ye observe and make it your law—to do your business by the voice of the people."

1. Lesley Brown, ed., *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 454, s.v. "common sense."

Few have noted the connection, but just over forty years prior to the publication of the Book of Mormon, James Madison also put the Commonsense Principle at the heart of his argument for why the Constitution should be ratified. On February 6, 1788, the Father of the Constitution emphasized that when a *sense* is held in *common* across our differences in America, it is a more reliable indicator of wisdom than a sense shared only within one segment of the country. In terms strikingly similar to Mosiah's, Madison explains in *Federalist* No. 51 that "in the extended republic of the United States, and among the great variety of interests, parties and sects which it embraces, a coalition of a majority of the whole society could seldom take place on any other principles than those of justice and the general good."[2]

The full logic behind Madison's argument becomes more apparent in connection with an astute observation he makes about human nature that anticipated a large body of modern social science research by nearly two hundred years. In *Federalist* No. 10, Madison notes that a natural "connection" exists between our "reason" and our "self-love." Our "opinions," he argues, "attach themselves" to our "passions."[3]

Social psychologists have found compelling empirical evidence for Madison's observation. Hundreds of studies document a "confirmation bias," a tendency to seek out information that confirms our preexisting views or supports our self-interest while turning a blind eye to information that disconfirms our preexisting views or runs counter to our self-interest.[4]

Together, *Federalist* No. 10 and No. 51 provide a powerful explanation for why broad and diverse support is a sound indicator of wisdom. When a view that a policy or candidate is wise is held in common across so many differences, Madison argues, it cannot be readily explained by self-interest, since those interests cut in so many conflicting directions. Instead, Madison reasons, broad consensus typically forms for reasons that transcend self-interest, reasons like justice and the general good.

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2. James Madison or Alexander Hamilton, "*The Federalist* No. 51, [6 February 1788]," Founders Online, National Archives and Records Administration, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-04-02-0199.

3. James Madison, "*The Federalist* Number 10, [22 November] 1787," Founders Online, National Archives and Records Administration, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-10-02-0178.

4. Raymond S. Nickerson, "Confirmation Bias: A Ubiquitous Phenomenon in Many Guises." *Review of General Psychology* 2, no. 2 (1998): 175–220, https://doi.org/10.1037/1089-2680.2.2.175.

Federalist No. 10 and No. 51 are the culmination of the argument Madison builds over a ten-month period. He starts with the publication of "Vices of the Political System of the United States" in April 1787, the result of his preparation for the upcoming Constitutional Convention. Madison argues that differences among the people constitute a check and balance as important as the separation of powers. An "enlargement of the sphere" of a republic better secures liberty, he argues, because a larger, more diverse republic is "broken into a greater variety of interests, of pursuits, of passions, which will check each other."[5]

Two months later, Madison elaborates the Commonsense Principle further in what Ralph Ketcham, Madison's most respected biographer, calls "his most important speech" of the Constitutional Convention. On June 6, early in the Founders' deliberations in Independence Hall, Madison concludes his remarks by telling his fellow delegates that the only remedy for the partisan tyranny so devastating to republics is to "enlarge the sphere" so that there is "so great a number of interests and parties" that consensus would not likely emerge separately from the common good.[6]

Madison's next refinement of his case comes a month after the conclusion of the convention. In his lengthy October 1787 letter to Thomas Jefferson in France describing the Constitution that the convention drafted, Madison explains to his closest mentor and colleague that the size and diversity of the United States means that "no common interest or passion will be likely to unite" the people "in an unjust pursuit."[7]

Madison's *Federalist* No. 10 and No. 51 and the three works leading up to them constitute one of the most intense bursts of consequential political thought in history. Together, they echo Mosiah and make a compelling case for why broad and diverse support is a sounder indicator of wisdom than a view held only by those who share the same interests or political perspective.

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5. James Madison, "Vices of the Political System of the United States, April 1787," Founders Online, National Archives and Records Administration, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Madison/01-09-02-0187.

6. Ralph Ketcham, *James Madison: A Biography* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1992), 200–201.

7. James Madison, "To Thomas Jefferson from James Madison, 24 October 1787," Founders Online, National Archives and Records Administration, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-12-02-0274.

The Commonsense Principle and the Constitution

Madison goes far beyond a compelling theoretical explanation of the Commonsense Principle over his ten-month burst of political innovation. He also makes it the cornerstone of the Constitution that governs the most successful republic in history.

"The Spirit of Party" Is the Chief Challenge to Republics

The centrality to our constitutional structure of the principle that broad support suggests wisdom is more obvious when one understands the main problem that the Founders were trying to solve. When the American Founders staked their lives and property on waging a war of independence from the most powerful empire in the world to establish the American republic, it was a stunningly audacious move. They were keenly aware that every one of the dozens of attempts at self-government over the preceding three thousand years had failed.

But it is not simply the boldness of their vision that is impressive. We continue to look to the Founders for wisdom because they made it work in practice. By establishing a lasting, vibrant republic, they bent the arc of history. Before the American revolution, self-government was considered a utopian ideal that could not last for any length of time or at any but the smallest scale. Since the success of the republic the Founders established, self-government has become the dominant form of government in the world.

They accomplished this remarkable feat by combining their audacious vision with a clear-eyed, relentlessly practical examination of why self-government had so consistently failed over the preceding three thousand years. They concluded that they had better understand why republics fail and have a better answer for it. Otherwise, they reasoned, they would suffer the same failures. Consequently, many of the key Founding Fathers—including James Madison, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton—studied the history of failed republics closely.

Although they conducted their historical investigations largely independently, a striking consensus emerged about the central problem they had to solve if the American republic was to succeed where all others had failed. Throughout their writings, they identified the "spirit of party" or the problem of "faction" as the main cause of republics' demise. They observed a consistent pattern. As soon as the ultimate power was placed in the people, the people divided themselves

into different groups seeking to drive the government in different directions. The contention that ensued among those parties, the Founders observed, made the government so incompetent and unstable that it opened the door for despotism to take hold again.

George Washington made warning his and succeeding generations of Americans about this existential challenge to republics the main theme of his Farewell Address. His departing words drew the nation's attention to the topic Washington considered "all important" to preserving the system of government that he had dedicated his life to establishing. The central theme of his Farewell Address in 1796 was his warning "in the most solemn manner against the baneful effects of the Spirit of Party." Those effects are so dire, he warned, that partisan animosity is the gravest threat to republics. In governments "of the popular form," Washington cautioned, the "Spirit of Party" is "seen in its greatest rankness and is truly their worst enemy." Sounding like he had been watching cable news in our day, he observed, "The alternate domination of one faction over another, sharpened by the spirit of revenge natural to party dissension, . . . is itself a frightful despotism." Washington concluded that the "common & continual mischiefs of the spirit of Party are sufficient to make it the interest and duty of a wise People to discourage and restrain it."[8]

Like Washington's Farewell Address, no theme is more prevalent in the *Federalist* than warnings about the "spirit of party." The core argument in the *Federalist* is that the Constitution should be ratified because it is better structured to withstand the problem of faction than any previous republic. In all, fifty-five of the eighty-five essays (65 percent) that James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay wrote include an argument for the Constitution that involves its superior ability to control partisan dysfunction.

For example, in *Federalist* No. 10, Madison famously and explicitly argues that the rancor among factions is the main problem the Constitution must address. He observes, "Among the numerous advantages promised by a well constructed union, none deserves to be more accurately developed than its tendency to break and control the violence of faction. The friend of popular governments never finds himself so much

8. George Washington, "Farewell Address, 19 September 1796," Founders Online, National Archives and Records Administration, https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/05-20-02-0440-0002.

alarmed for their character and fate, as when he contemplates their propensity to this dangerous vice."[9]

Madison further explains in No. 10 that this is the central challenge for republics because partisan strife is the chief cause of their failure. He concludes that "the instability, injustice and confusion introduced into the public councils" by factional contention "have in truth been the mortal diseases under which popular governments have every where perished." The *Federalist* makes clear that the Founders' rationale for the structure of our Constitution simply cannot be understood without comprehending that first and foremost they aimed to address the excesses of partisanship, the chief infirmity to which previous republics had succumbed.

Framing a Constitution against Partisan Tyranny

If the Founders concluded that partisan dysfunction was the main problem to solve in establishing a successful republic, what then was their answer to that problem? In short, their answer was to erect constitutional barriers to, in Mosiah's words, "the lesser part of the people" imposing their unwise purposes on everyone else (29:26). Structuring the Constitution this way, as Madison explains, makes it necessary for the American people to conduct themselves according to the Commonsense Principle. Only measures wise enough to attract broad and diverse support, Madison reasons, should be able to overcome the barriers to partisan tyranny built into the Constitution.

The two main structural barriers, in Madison's view, that require common sense are separation of powers and establishing a republic that encompasses a large and diverse people. Although the American Founders did not invent the idea of separating powers, they took it much further than it had ever been taken before. A constitution of separated powers by which a diverse people with many competing interests and perspectives would govern themselves, Madison conceives, would prove to be a powerful check against measures that could not attract support beyond one party or the other. The only alternative, by intentional design, is to find and champion solutions wise enough to attract support beyond one party or another.

9. Madison, "*Federalist* Number 10."

The Departure from the Commonsense Principle in Contemporary American Politics

It seems obvious to the most casual observer that today we have strayed far from the Commonsense Principle that Mosiah and Madison articulate. We may disagree about why it has happened or who is chiefly to blame, but most of us have a creeping suspicion that something is disturbingly different today. Our political discourse seems increasingly like tribal warfare. Rather than following the Commonsense Principle, today's politics seem too often characterized by its opposite. To the most fervent partisans, the other side's agreement with an idea is treated as definitive evidence that it must be a bad one that should be vigorously opposed.

Nostalgic sentiments that things were better in the "good old days" are often contradicted by an honest review of the facts. It is certainly true that we have been more deeply divided before. We remain far from the carnage of the Civil War. The turmoil of the 1960s grew out of especially deep divisions.

Unfortunately, however, the empirical evidence in several respects supports our sneaking suspicion that something really has gone wrong that is new, or at least not typical. What is different about our time is how consistently our differences break along party lines. There were pro- and antislavery wings in both the Democratic and Whig Parties that dominated American politics in the years leading up to the Civil War. The civil rights movement also didn't play out along purely partisan lines. A higher percentage of Republicans in the House (80 percent) voted for President Lyndon Johnson's 1964 Civil Rights Act than Democrats (61 percent).[10]

Empirical Evidence on Congressional Polarization

It is not just the vote on the Civil Rights Act. Perhaps the clearest evidence of an unprecedented level of polarization that breaks along party lines comes from an analysis of all roll call votes in Congress. Political scientists Keith Poole, Howard Rosenthal, and their colleagues have developed a rigorous method of analyzing the more than 14 million roll

10. David Winston, "A Needed Lesson in Bipartisanship: The Civil Rights Act of 1964," *Roll Call,* March 31, 2021, https://www.rollcall.com/2021/03/31/a-needed-lesson-in-bipartisanship-the-civil-rights-act-of-1964/.

call votes cast by members of Congress since it first convened in 1789.[11] Their method reveals that the 114th Congress that served from 2015 to 2016 broke the previous record for party-line voting that had stood for 218 years.[12] Today, congressional Republicans and Democrats are quantifiably more divided in how they vote on bills than they have ever been.[13] The parties' ability to work together to pass the broadly supported measures for which the Constitution was designed has never been so feeble.

Political scientists like Matthew Levendusky[14] and Alan Abramowitz,[15] along with Poole and Rosenthal, conclude that the increased party-line voting in Congress is largely a reflection of ideological sorting. For the vast majority of our more than two hundred years under the Constitution, both major parties were a mix of conservatives, moderates, and liberals. Until the 1980s, conservative southern Democrats and liberal "Rockefeller" Republicans, mostly from the north, were common.[16] As noted above, one prominent example of this is that a higher percentage of Republicans voted for the 1964 Civil Rights Act than Democrats. Today, the parties are much more ideologically sorted. There are virtually no conservatives in the Democratic Party, and the number of moderates continues to decline. Similarly, there are virtually no liberals and a declining number of moderates in the Republican Party.

Our sinking feeling that this is not just a passing problem is also confirmed by the roll call vote data that Poole, Rosenthal, and their colleagues have provided. Today's partisan trend started in the 1970s. It has been building ever since, making the forty-year acceleration in party-line roll call voting the longest in American history. The unprecedented long-term trend reflects a deeper, systemic change that is unlike the shorter-term spikes in partisan polarization that we have previously experienced.[17]

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11. Keith T. Poole and Howard Rosenthal, *Ideology & Congress,* 2nd ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 2007), x.

12. Jeffrey B. Lewis and others, "Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database," Voteview, accessed December 7, 2021, https://voteview.com/data.

13. Nolan McCarty, Keith T. Poole, and Howard Rosenthal, *Polarized America: The Dance of Ideology and Unequal Riches,* 2nd ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2016), 2–3.

14. Matthew Levendusky, *The Partisan Sort: How Liberals Became Democrats and Conservatives Became Republicans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 1–2.

15. Alan Abramowitz, *The Great Alignment: Race, Party Transformation, and the Rise of Donald Trump* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2018), 2.

16. Levendusky, *Partisan Sort,* 2.

17. Jeffrey B. Lewis and others, "Voteview: Congressional Roll-Call Votes Database," Voteview, accessed December 7, 2021, https://voteview.com/data.

At a theoretical level, ideologically coherent parties would seem to make sense. The unprecedented challenge they pose in our system, however, is that ideological parties in practice prove to be poor at pursuing solutions wise enough to attract support beyond their base. The ideologically mixed parties that have characterized virtually all of American history prior to the last forty years were reasonably good engines for broadly supported solutions, by necessity. Given the mix of liberals, moderates, and conservatives in both parties, candidates and policies had to attract broad support to be viable. The mix also made it easier for the two parties to work together.

In contrast, today's parties focus on solutions that attract support only from the committed members who constitute their base. At most, the bases of the Republican and Democratic parties each represent about 30 percent of Americans. Roughly 40 percent of Americans consider themselves independent.[18]

No republic will ever be successful or stable if 30 percent of the country imposes its will on the other 70 percent. Even without knowing the chief reason that prior republics failed or understanding the Founders' dire warnings about such dynamics, that much should be painfully self-evident. Parties that are intent on imposing the fervent will of their base on everyone else are particularly dysfunctional, however, in a constitutional republic purposely structured to frustrate such narrow, partisan measures. Parties can sometimes win elections by stirring the pot of political divisions to mobilize their base. However, they cannot govern effectively within a constitutional structure designed to check such partisan aims.

Social Sorting and the Formation of Political Tribes

Unfortunately, the dysfunctional and systemic changes unique to our day have not stopped with sorting the parties into more purely conservative and liberal groups. Starting in earnest in the 1990s, the United States also began an unprecedented alignment between party identity and other powerful social identities. In the 1960s and 1970s, if you knew whether someone went to church frequently, lived in an urban or rural area, or what their race was, it told you almost nothing about what party they belonged to. Parties were ideologically mixed and also contained a healthy mix of these other defining identities. Today, religious activity,

18. "Party Affiliation," Gallup, December 7, 2021, https://news.gallup.com/poll/15370/party-affiliation.aspx.

race, and whether one lives in an urban or rural area are highly correlated with party identification. Our party identification is no longer simply a reflection of dispassionate judgments about what is wise public policy. It now defines who we are in a very personal way. Our political party today defines our tribe to an extent that is unique in American history.[19]

More than the ideological sorting, it is this social sorting that fuels the anger driving our politics now.[20] Rather than a sober debate on the merits of policy proposals, policy battles today are proxies for defeating a competing tribe.

The social rancor side of today's partisan battles makes the Founders' warnings about the "spirit of party" more relevant for our generation than any preceding one. We do not have a commonly used term today that is synonymous. The closest term we have is "partisanship." By using the term "*spirit* of party," however, the Founders were emphasizing the angry animosity that attends the most dysfunctional kind of partisanship. In Washington's eerily apt words for our day, it is "party dissension" that is "sharpened by the spirit of revenge" that is so devastating to republics.[21]

Cause for Hope: Everyday Americans Are Much Less Polarized on the Issues

Amid the sobering evidence of the ways in which today's partisan polarization poses unique challenges for our structure of government, there is a crucial bright spot. The evidence indicates that everyday Democrats and Republicans are far less polarized on the issues than it seems.[22]

To characterize polarization in contemporary American politics accurately, political scientists have found it necessary to distinguish between social, or affective, polarization and issues polarization.[23] Social polarization is the level of animosity that Republicans and Democrats feel toward each other. Issues polarization is the distance between

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19. Abramowitz, *Great Alignment,* 43–71.

20. Lilliana Mason, *Uncivil Agreement: How Politics Became Our Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018), 4.

21. Washington, "Farewell Address, 19 September 1796."

22. Morris P. Fiorina, Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope, *Culture War?: The Myth of a Polarized America* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2005).

23. Shanto Iyengar and others, "The Origins and Consequences of Affective Polarization in the United States," *Annual Review of Political Science* 22, no. 1 (May 2019): 130–32, https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051117-073034.

Republicans and Democrats on specific policy questions. It is also important to distinguish between key groups to describe polarization today. In addition to distinguishing between elected officials and citizens, it is useful to distinguish between the small minority of citizens who are very active in politics and the vast majority of everyday Americans who are not.

The general pattern is that both issues polarization and social polarization are currently at the highest levels ever recorded and rising rapidly. The critical exception is that issues polarization among everyday citizens remains low and is rising only slowly.

Reviewing the evidence, the political scientist Lilliana Mason has aptly described us as a nation that agrees on many things but is bitterly divided nonetheless.[24] Such a curious state of affairs requires an explanation. If Republican and Democratic voters agree on so much, why are we so angry at each other?

Two related factors explain most of the paradox. First, as discussed above, the increased alignment between our partisan and other tribes, including our ideological, religious, racial, and geographic identities, contributes to high animosity, even though we agree on much. A vast body of social psychological research consistently finds that we judge members of a competing group much more harshly and become much angrier at them than we do members of our own group.[25]

Second, we are mad at the other side because of a "perception gap" leading us to think they are far more extreme than they really are.[26] In fact, research indicates that Americans *think* the differences in policy views between everyday Republicans and Democrats are on average about twice as big as they actually are.[27] Thinking that those on the other side are twice as extreme as they really are obviously fuels anger because they are seen as working to foist such unreasonable and dangerous views on the country. In fact, exaggerated perceptions of the extremity of other

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24. Mason, *Uncivil Agreement,* 4.

25. Michael A. Hogg and Dominic Abrams, *Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes* (New York: Routledge, 1998).

26. Daniel Yudkin, Stephen Hawkins, and Tim Dixon, *The Perception Gap: How False Impressions Are Pulling Americans Apart* (New York: More in Common, June 2019), accessed December 9, 2021, https://perceptiongap.us/.

27. Jacob Westfall and others, "Perceiving Political Polarization in the United States: Party Identity Strength and Attitude Extremity Exacerbate the Perceived Partisan Divide," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 10, no. 2 (March 11, 2015): 145–58, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1745691615569849.

groups is a common social psychological dynamic between groups of all sorts in all times, not just Republicans and Democrats in the United States today.[28] The increasingly polarized structure of American politics, however, amplifies this universal psychological tendency.[29] For example, more politically active Americans really are more extreme than the vast majority of us who are less engaged.[30] Talking louder and longer about politics than the rest of us, including on social media, they create an outsized impression. The news media also give these extreme voices disproportionate airtime. No wonder we have exaggerated views of our differences.

More alarmingly, politicians stoke the exaggerated perceptions because they understand that they can mobilize support by painting the other side as being more extreme and a greater threat than they really are. No one has explained this timeless political ploy better than George Washington. He recognizes that there are always politicians more interested in their own power than in the good of the nation, people who are mere politicians rather than real leaders. Recognizing the timeless political temptation to stoke the spirit of party, he warns that we as a people must be wise enough not to fall for these ploys. "One of the expedients of party to acquire influence," he says in his Farewell Address, "is to misrepresent the opinions & aims of other" parties. He warns that "designing men" try to "excite a belief" that there are greater differences in Americans' "interests and views" than actually exists. These designing men seek to acquire power by rendering "alien to each other those who ought to be bound together by fraternal affection." He implores, "You cannot shield yourselves too much against the jealousies and heart burnings which spring from these misrepresentations."[31] The changes in our two-party system have made Washington's warnings truer and more critical than ever.

Being Anxiously Engaged in Political Common Sense

If we are to move from the toxic dysfunction of today's politics to a place where we can govern ourselves more effectively, the American people will need to be our saving grace. The most fundamental point is that the

28. Abrams and Hogg, *Social Identifications.*
29. Mason, *Uncivil Agreement,* 4.
30. Abramowitz, *Great Alignment,* 17.
31. Washington, "Farewell Address, 19 September 1796."

majority of us who have not been very involved politically must become more engaged, as Church leaders have continually encouraged. If the broad swath of us who are less polarized on the issues cede the stage to the minority who are the most extreme, we can hardly expect anything but extreme politics.

Many of us understand that we need to be more engaged. We just struggle to find ways to be involved that are feasible and effective and that do not require the demonizing tribal politics that we find abhorrent.

Mosiah's and Madison's Commonsense Principle points the way. The alternative approaches that the nation needs involve everyday citizens engaging across our divisions to champion policies and candidates wise enough to attract broad, bipartisan support. It is important to note that Madison does not call for a "go along to get along" attitude in which we compromise on our convictions. It is the principled, substantive, and respectful advocacy of different perspectives, in fact, that Madison believes provides the rigor that produces wiser decisions.

The research on low issues polarization creates a solid foundation for hope that the Commonsense Principle can prevail. Being anxiously engaged in advancing commonsense candidates and solutions is easier and more effective than it seems. If you are hungry for a more respectful, practical, problem-solving-oriented politics, you have far more company than you know.

The Commonsense Principle is in many ways easiest to pursue at the local level. Relatively small groups who come together across divisions within a community to champion commonsense solutions can have a profound effect at the school district, town, and county levels.

At the state and federal levels, there are options for engagement both in elections and on issues that are especially promising. For involvement in elections, the most promising, and the simplest, option is voting. It should be obvious that people need to register to vote and then, in fact, turn out to vote. What may be less obvious is how important it is that we turn out to vote specifically in primary elections. The electorate that turns out for primary elections is often more ideologically extreme than the electorate for the general election.[32] The result in the general election is often a choice between what many regard as the

32. David W. Brady, Hahrie Han, and Jeremy C. Pope, "Primary Elections and Candidate Ideology: Out of Step with the Primary Electorate?" *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (February 2007): 79–105.

lesser of two evils. One of the most important and effective ways that we can better follow Mosiah's and Madison's Commonsense Principle is for more of us to turn out in primary elections and then vote for commonsense candidates. Commonsense candidates are characterized by a desire to bring us together, rather than divide us further, and by an ability to draw support beyond the base of their own party.

Effective commonsense engagement on issues at the state and federal level is admittedly more challenging, requiring a greater level of citizen organization. It has been the driving passion of my career to develop effective ways for everyday Americans to identify and then champion solutions wise enough to attract broad, bipartisan support in their state legislatures and in Congress.

I am delighted to report recent and remarkable success on this front. In January 2019, the National Institute for Civil Discourse launched the CommonSense American program. We now have over thirty-five thousand members from across the nation and political spectrum. Each member commits to spending ninety minutes per year reviewing a policy brief and then weighing in. We then engage Congress with the results in two ways. First, members share their own views with their representative and two senators. Second, our staff conducts congressional briefings on the overall results, focusing on identifying those solutions wise enough to attract broad, bipartisan support.

It is already working. The first issue we took on was surprise medical billing. CommonSense American members played a significant role in helping convince Congress to pass an act in December 2020 that ended the practice. For years there had been wide recognition that the practice should stop. Regardless of party, few defended this practice in which out-of-network providers cared for tens of thousands of patients per year without patients' knowledge or consent and then sent high, unexpected bills that the patients were legally obligated to pay. Still, Congress had not been able to act. Our more than 150 congressional briefings on the results from thousands of Americans informing themselves and weighing in helped make the difference. The more than fifteen hundred unique emails our members sent to their members of Congress also had an important impact.

More recently, we worked on infrastructure. We engaged the White House, 42 Senators, and 178 Representatives with the results from thousands of members who reviewed our infrastructure brief. Another important channel through which everyday Americans' voices were heard on the topic was the coverage of our results in *USA Today* shortly

before the Senate vote on August 10, 2021, and in *The Hill* shortly before the House vote on November 11, 2021.[33] The combined effect contributed to passing the bipartisan infrastructure bill that focused on physical infrastructure separate from the Democrats' social spending bill.

You are invited to join this national effort to pursue the Commonsense Principle that Mosiah and Madison explained. You can join at www.CommonSenseAmerican.org.

Regardless of how each of us chooses to pursue the Commonsense Principle, we all need to do our part as our generation meets the challenge of bitter partisan polarization. It falls to us to ensure that American self-government not only endures but thrives. We inherited the most successful republic in world history. Sitting on the sidelines is not an option in times like these. We owe it to our children and our children's children to pass onto them a republic that fulfills the vision the Founders had for it, a system of self-government with less partisan tyranny and frustration, and more liberty and justice, for all. As Mosiah and Madison taught, the key is common sense.

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33. Keith Allred, "Building Bridges: Why Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal Is a Win for America's Moderates," *USA Today,* August 9, 2021, https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2021/08/09/why-bidens-infrastructure-deal-rejection-political-extremes/5509577001/; Keith Allred, "Voters Oppose Holding Infrastructure Hostage," *The Hill,* November 11, 2021, https://thehill.com/blogs/congress-blog/politics/580253-voters-oppose-holding-infrastructure-hostage?rl=1.