

# Wendy Riemann: Marriage counseling for Congress?

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This past week's shooting was horrific and we hope for healing. However, in typical Washington fashion, an outcry of outrage happens, demonstrations of unity follow, and prayers that God heal the nation round out the list of action items, but the wounded political system remains.

Then a weekend comes, or a hot second passes, and it is back to business as usual with the hateful rhetoric. After former Congresswoman Gabby Giffords was shot, the time lapse was even shorter before the attack dogs were back out lapping water from the swamp.

I believe most of our elected officials are sincere in their outrage, hope for unity, and prayers; yet I do not believe God will heal our nation without us actually committed to changing our own individual hearts - and that must start now.

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The majority of our U.S. House and Senate members are married. What if each went home and argued with their spouse in Washington tone? What if each firmly held their ground, claiming their spouse's position is not good enough? What if each refused to cooperate or compromise with their spouse?

If they did, their marriage would likely be unhappy and/or short-lived. But, a forced, unloving marriage is what we do and see in Washington each day. We hold our ground, refuse to compromise, and declare my way or the highway on a 24-hour news channel. Worse, we point fingers and say, "well they did it first," or "they did this so we can do that," as if Jimmy was explaining why he hit Billy on the

playground.

No child could thrive in such a hostile environment, so how do we expect our nation to prosper? Washington behavior trickles down to Main Street.

I have worked on Capitol Hill and found the majority of elected officials and staff have good character and pure hearts, eager to serve and make a difference – so why the disconnect? This did not just start.

Collectively, we all must be better and more civil than this – and if there was ever a time for Washington to lead by example and America's citizens to follow, this is it.

We may not be legally married to the opposing party, but like it or not, the wagons of Republicans and Democrats are hitched. A love for America, an eagerness to serve, and a need to grow a strong country unites us – even if we disagree on how to achieve that.

The partnership is for better and for worse – and if our individual attitudes, tone, and ability to compromise do not get better – our nation is looking at much worse.

Imagine if officials were not as worried about being primaried further to the left or right so they could look toward the center and common ground instead of turning further away from colleagues.

Imagine if citizens praised officials working toward solutions or applauded them for pushing back on constituents spewing hate and extreme positions.

Imagine if citizens attacked researched facts – not people and parties – with their words, social media posts, and actions. Or even better, envisioned a loved one on the receiving end of their words, posts, and actions.

Imagine if we did not hold the feet to the fire of a Member or Senator for not being back in the district/state constantly, so that once a month, or even once a quarter, Members could act more like family and spend time getting to know each other in Washington without running from vote to fundraiser to meeting. Back in the day, Members and Senators did not fly-in at the last minute for votes and fly-out the second votes were cast – they knew each other on both sides of the aisle, held private dinners together, and genuinely got to know each other.

Perhaps it is too Pollyanna, but I prefer that to the alternative horror we witnessed

this past week - we cannot continue down that dark rabbit hole. We each must choose to make a conscious effort to step back into the light of civility, strengthen our communication, and self-correct each time we stumble ... and who better to first cross the aisle as unified partners, than our elected officials.

— *Riemann is president of 1492 Communications, a consulting firm. Like [1492 Communications](#) on Facebook to learn more.*