

How You Can Help Change the Course of a Nation

Read Time: 6 Minutes 17 Seconds

As Americans, we tend to attack the fruit and not the roots of what is happening in our country. The television is full of people speaking out with incredible frustration about the fruit of bad policy decisions and corrupt leaders. Often, it seems that dismal results and failures abound.

But no one is talking about what is *really* causing these things.

Working for a freshman member of Congress when I was in my 20s was one of my most rewarding and eye-opening experiences. It was also one of the most grueling. Often, I worked 70 to 80 hours a week when Congress was in session, sometimes more.

It was not uncommon to arrive back at my office at 7 o'clock some mornings after having gone home at 2 a.m. I would drive home, get three or four hours of sleep, take a shower, put on fresh clothes, and hurry to be back before the boss arrived. If he was going down to the floor of the US House of Representatives that morning with my talking points or to vote on something in my issue area, I knew I had to be there the minute he walked in that door. I had to brief him and ensure he had what he needed.

As a brand-new legislative assistant, I was making \$28,000 a year while living in one of the most expensive cities in the world. I barely made enough to pay my rent and buy a few groceries. At that time, most Hill staffers like me typically lived off of the food served at the receptions held almost every evening somewhere on the Capitol complex. Necessity made us organized, and we would call each other around 4:30 or 5:00p.m. to share which receptions were going to have the best

food. Years later, my friends and I still joke that had it not been for those receptions, we might have starved!

Knowing how Congress works and understanding how our nation's policies are formed is something that every young person interested in our government should seek to experience. I encourage everyone who is high school or college age to consider doing an internship on Capitol Hill or in the White House or a federal agency.

Washington is truly a remarkable place where you will see the best and the worst in people, but the skills and knowledge you gain there will serve you the rest of your life.

All the pressure that members of Congress as well as their staffs are under from just the work stress alone, in addition to the fact that Capitol Hill breeds a lot of internecine battles, makes it an incredibly difficult place to work. But it is also one of the most incredible places on the planet to make a difference. The connections you make, the skills you learn and the knowledge you gain about how our government operates are invaluable. It also gives one a better understanding of how decisions are made and what really drives public policy. If you are called to politics, this type of firsthand training is critical. Even if you are not called to serve in this way, it is always helpful to know how your government works.

To deal with the root causes of some of the issues we are facing, we must first seek to truly understand the problems and then stop supporting those things that are fueling them. What would our government look like if we only supported people who are truly called to politics and are properly trained?

We, as average citizens, need to invest more in our government on a daily basis because if we don't, others who may not share our values will. Christians pray that God will raise up people

who will lead us with biblical values, but what are we doing to support them and their staffs when they are campaigning or after they get into office?

Our investment can take many forms. First and foremost, start with prayer and direct involvement. Investment also means making certain that you are participating and paying attention to what is being discussed and debated.

The only way to root out the corruption and rampant self-benefiting behavior of so many of our political leaders is for more people to enter the arena who have a common goal of wanting to foster good government and good policy decisions. After all, this is a numbers game and most honest people who are there simply to serve are quite often outnumbered. This may seem overwhelming to those who have tried to go it alone, but it is not so overwhelming if we approach it as a body—the body.

Changing a Nation's Course

My first job on Capitol Hill was helping former House speaker Newt Gingrich drain the congressional swamp. As part of the senior leadership team for the newly created chief administrative officer (CAO) for the House of Representatives, we immediately went to work to bring reforms to the broken and often unaccounted for financial systems and taxpayer-funded operations of Congress.

For example, when decades of old furniture belonging to the House of Representatives, and thus the American people, was discovered sitting in a dusty warehouse in Washington with no purpose, we did something truly outside the box: we held a yard sale on the front steps of a federal government building and auctioned everything off! After cleaning out the warehouse and closing it down, the savings to the taxpayers totaled \$235,000 per year from just that basic step of getting rid of old, useless furniture. That was just the beginning.

Our team then pushed for the first independent audit of the House since 1789, the year George Washington was first inaugurated as president. This audit shined the brightest of spotlights on Congress, unleashing historic changes and reforms and using business-minded approaches when spending taxpayers' money. These unprecedented reforms called out politics as usual and resulted in the core operations of the people's House having much greater accountability and transparency.

Holding government accountable and fighting for conservative values is desperately needed; but often, average people don't understand the critical role they play in helping to make that happen. Sometimes the best way to support a public figure is to hold them accountable. So often, those in elected leadership positions find it more and more challenging to take a hard stand. As you become more senior and are appointed or elected to higher-level roles, the battles become more difficult, and often, complex things are happening below the surface around a decision. It baffles the public that certain decisions are made because they only have limited amounts of information. As my former boss Scot Faulkner used to jokingly say, "In politics, you should never let rational thinking get in the way of a good decision."

Many of us need to develop a less adversarial relationship with our leaders and find ways to support them. Perhaps it's time to quit complaining and just get to work! This may mean forming groups that research specific topics using thoroughly vetted, credible sources, then summarizing those findings and presenting them to your government leaders. Consider making a presentation in a meeting with their office to let them know there is strong constituent support on that issue. It may also mean speaking out publicly at town hall meetings, radio interviews, etc. This is the only way to counterbalance some of the impact of paid lobbyists who currently provide research or policy suggestions for those in government with their own

interests in mind.

Often, the only people who are providing information for those in decision-making positions in government are paid to do so and have very specific agendas that are almost always geared toward benefiting a company or a special interest. By getting more directly involved, average citizens can push back against this type of one-sided process and allow lawmakers to hear from all sides. {eoa}

The preceding was excerpted from chapter 12 of Terri Hasdorff's book, "Running Into the Fire" (Charisma House, 2022). For more information, or to order the book, visit .

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Terri Hasdorff is a former congressional candidate and an executive-level leader with over 20 years' experience in government and politics. She began her career in 1991 in what is now called the White House Office of Public Engagement, where she had the honor of working with faith leaders from across the country. She later served on Capitol Hill for six years, then ran for a seat in the US House to represent Alabama's second congressional district. She has a bachelor's degree from Samford University, is a graduate of the senior executives program at Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and is currently in the executive MBA program at Oxford University.