

**Research!America Chair John Edward Porter
Advocacy Awards Dinner Speech
March 13, 2013**

This evening, we're going to hear, as we should, about the importance of federally funded research for health----about how it goes hand in hand with the work of industry, patient groups, and philanthropy to improve our health, our lives, and our economy.

I've shared my views with you on that subject repeatedly.

I've also shared them with numerous policy makers on the Hill as Chair of Research!America, as have all members of this organization as advocates for research and innovation.

Instead, tonight, I'd like to focus on what we Americans---all of us---need to do, in my judgment, to address the flaws in our political and governmental system which today is characterized by and encourages extreme partisanship and an inability to address our country's problems.

These flaws are what are at the heart of the sequester and all of the other idiotic posturing that is supposed to pass as governing.

With our Constitution, our founders gave us a strong framework for making inclusive decisions.

Then we do everything possible to scam our system for partisan advantage and to undermine decision-making by the majority.

Now, these may be things you know, but haven't thought of for a long time:

We have private political clubs called parties institutionalized in every aspect of our governmental structure in such a way that insures gridlock and partisan rancor on a seemingly unending scale.

Parties----both parties----draw our congressional districts to maximize party advantage.

Combined with closed primary elections this means that the decision as to who will represent us is made in 80-90% of the districts in the primary, not the general, election.

This is almost always dictated by either the most conservative or the most liberal voters.

Moderates, who identify with neither party, are denied any meaningful role in this closed electoral process.

In our nation's Capitol building, the trappings of partisanship are everywhere evident.

Our national legislative houses are physically divided by party---- one party on one side of the aisle, the other party on the other.

In the House of Representatives, a Member speaks from the podium of his party.

Each party has its own podium.

They also have separate leadership tables, separate cloakrooms, separate floor offices, and separate staffs, all paid for by the taxpayers.

The Speaker of the House by tradition is the leader of the majority party----by definition, the most partisan of his party's members, and the minority leadership is the same.

Each party has opulent leadership offices within the Capitol building, large staffs, and the party leaders are paid extra compensation, all from the public's treasury.

The parties also provide themselves millions of dollars of public support for their party conventions.

All this and more flows from all of us to these two private political clubs who treat their opposite congressional colleagues as the enemy, discourage working together or any interaction, and fight ideological battles while our country's needs are allowed to fester.

I not saying, in case you think I am, that we shouldn't have political parties.

We should and will.

But we shouldn't have them so institutionalized in our governmental processes, pay for them out of the federal treasury, and allow them to overcome the good common sense of our founder's structures.

We shouldn't allow them to game the system for their own advantage, allowing filibusters of any measure, including the

motion to proceed in the Senate, or having closed rules in the House to preclude the minority from offering any amendments.

We shouldn't pay for these private clubs to pursue their political advantages.

And, at the very least, it seems reasonable in exchange for all these public moneys and trappings of power we give them, to ask them to do some governing.

And you may not have thought about the fact that, for as long as I can remember, a new President of either party brings into the White House to govern the same people who just worked on his staff to get him elected.

It's time to address these matters, to return power to the majority of the American people who follow neither party's extreme agenda but believe government must act for the good of our country, not the good of the party.

This can be done if we have the will to make it happen.

We can replace partisan warfare with collegial problem-solving through compromise which our system has always required.

The keys to doing so are ending partisan gerrymandering and closed party primaries..

Let's make the parties end mindless sequesters, stupid debt ceiling fights, and ongoing abdication of governing responsibilities.

Let's insist that our legislators of both parties come to grips with our structural deficit problem, put entitlements and tax reform on the table, and, once again, make investments in science, technology, innovation, and research among our nation's highest priorities.

Thanks for listening to me.

747 words (5+ minutes)