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Relationships and Trust are Missing in Politics, Say Governors Cox and Lujan Grisham

Bipartisan leaders stress connection and civility as antidotes to misaligned incentives in politics at the Reagan Foundation Center on Civility and Democracy's Common Ground Forum

SIMI VALLEY, CA – The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute's (RRPFI) Center on Civility and Democracy (CCD) held an event on Monday evening featuring Utah Governor Spencer Cox (R) and New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham (D), who engaged in a wide-ranging discussion about the political incentives created by the 24-hour news cycle, the loneliness crisis in American life, how Washington has changed over the last decade in response to social media, and what can be done to rebuild a new consensus around civil discourse and productive governing. They also discussed how, in this era, state governments present more opportunities for collaborative problem solving than do federal institutions, and should be a model to guide the federal government back toward constructive dialogue and effective governance. The event, moderated by Steve Hayes of The Dispatch, was the second in CCD's Common Ground Forum series.



"In a time of growing division, Americans are increasingly concerned about the health of our democracy," said Fred Ryan, Director of the Center on Civility and Democracy. "In our recent <u>national survey</u>, over half of Americans said our democracy is weaker than it once was, and among those over 65, that number rises to 72 percent. But there is hope: 83 percent said they want elected officials to work harder to find common ground. That's why we created the Common Ground Forum – to model a better path through respectful dialogue and principled leadership, just as President Reagan did throughout his presidency."

Governors Cox and Lujan Grisham discussed the need for relationship building, at the highest levels of state and federal government, as well as in day-to-day life at home, work and in religious communities.

"The political landscape just doesn't lend itself to getting to know your colleagues the way it used to," said New Mexico Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham. "You don't share meals, you're not on the same softball team, you don't go to church together – and that lack of connection makes it easier to see each other as adversaries instead of fellow public servants. We need to reverse that. We need the courage to make political affiliation a little less important and community participation a lot more important. That's how we begin to rebuild trust."

Utah Governor Spencer Cox emphasized that real change starts at the neighborhood level. "The solutions to our country's divisions aren't going to come from Washington, D.C. – and probably not from our state capitals either," he said. "We have to build relationships with people who think differently than we do, getting to know our neighbors, and spending time with folks outside our own political bubbles. Trust is built through local human connection."

Following the on-stage discussion, a private dinner brought together a smaller group of local mayors, state senate staffers from both parties, and donors. This private group continued the dialogue, emphasizing the importance of bipartisan collaboration across all levels of government.

The Center on Civility and Democracy will continue its Common Ground Forum series, exploring how leaders and citizens alike can help bridge political divides. Its inaugural Common Ground Forum, "Rivalry and Sportsmanship in America's Game," held before the iconic Army-Navy football game this past December, highlighted the role that sports can play in cultivating civility and sustainable democracy. Future topics may range from media and technology to education and civic engagement. Each forum will reflect CCD's mission to foster dialogue and identify solutions to build a more unified and respectful society.

For more information about the Common Ground Forum series and upcoming events, visit www.reaganfoundation.org/center-on-civility-and-democracy.

About the Center on Civility and Democracy

The Center on Civility and Democracy, an initiative of the Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute, is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to addressing the deep divisions and discord that threaten the foundations of American democracy. The Center fosters constructive solutions by promoting collaboration, respectful dialogue, and principled leadership. Learn more at https://www.reaganfoundation.org/center-on-civility-and-democracy.

About the Reagan Foundation and Institute

The Ronald Reagan Presidential Foundation and Institute (RRPFI) is the sole nonprofit organization created by President Reagan charged with advancing his legacy and principles – limited government, individual liberty, economic opportunity, freedom and democracy, peace through strength, and national pride.

A globally recognized nonpartisan organization based in Simi Valley, CA, with a leading policy institute in Washington, DC, RRPFI delivers impactful public affairs programming, policy convenings and projects of national and international significance, and distinctive educational initiatives. In addition, RRPFI sustains the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, the largest and most visited presidential library, which routinely hosts major special exhibitions.

An hour from Los Angeles International Airport, RRPFI's Simi Valley campus sits on 400 acres, serves as the final resting place of America's 40th President and former First Lady Nancy Reagan, displays a chunk of the Berlin Wall, and houses the plane President Reagan flew as Air Force One to 26 countries. Onsite are the Reagan Center for Public Affairs, Presidential Learning Center, Air Force One Pavilion, and the Reagan Leadership Academy. More information is available at www.reaganfoundation.org.