

Congressman Reed and the Problem Solvers Caucus

Executive Summary

Tom Reed is Co-Chair of the House Problem Solvers Caucus, and frequently touts the Caucus as a source of common sense solutions. When local residents disagree with his positions, Reed assures them that he will speak about their comments and questions with the Caucus. He uses the Caucus as a prop to tout his dedication to the Country over and above party loyalty. But Reed's voting history and the poor legislative record of the Caucus tell a different story. Despite his paying lip service to bipartisanship, Reed votes with President Trump 96% of the time. And far from being a font of effective legislating, the Caucus has supported and helped to pass only one piece of legislation: a one-week extension for budget negotiations.

While true bipartisanship should be celebrated, the Caucus appears to be merely a self-promotional gimmick and black hole for ideas that run counter to Reed's establishment ideology. Caucus discussions appear to be time-consuming, with any resulting proposal being needlessly complicated, watered-down, and not leading to passage of legislation. The Caucus seems to spend little of its time on substance; focusing instead on identifying issues, calling for meetings, and publicizing its bipartisanship. The Caucus operates largely in secret, with little information available on its membership, membership criteria, deliberations, initiatives, or results. What little information there is reads like a press release drafted by congressional staffers.

The House Problem Solvers Caucus exists to solve the problem of getting its members re-elected. Its poor legislative record, lack of transparency, and use as an argumentative foil and bipartisanship talking point attest to that fact. With a track record like that, it is no surprise that Tom Reed holds a leadership position as the Caucus' Co-Chair.

Problem Solvers Caucus History and Background¹

In discussions and press conferences Congressman Reed frequently refers to a loosely assembled group of Congresspersons as the “Problem Solvers Caucus.” The Caucus is comprised of approximately 48 members of the House of Representatives who are equally divided between Democrats and Republicans. It ostensibly seeks out bi-partisan cooperation on key policy issues.

The Caucus developed as an outgrowth of informal meetings organized by the political reform group No Labels.² The Caucus currently co-chaired by Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ) and Tom Reed (R-NY23). Past successes of No Labels include the introduction of nine bipartisan bills to reduce government waste and inefficiency and the passage of the No Budget, No Pay Act of 2013.³ In the last year, Caucus members aligned behind ambitious bipartisan proposals on healthcare reform, immigration and border security, infrastructure, and gun safety. None of these proposals were brought to a vote on the House floor.

The Problem Solvers Caucus and Congressman Reed

Last year the Rochester *Democrat and Chronicle* reported that the Problem Solvers Caucus had had about 80 members in 2016. During Tom Reed’s tenure in the Caucus, he and co-chairman Gottheimer revised the by-laws to try to make the Caucus more influential by only taking a position when 75 percent of the full caucus — including a minimum of 51 percent from each party — agrees.⁴

Although Congressman Reed has said, "I care deeply that we must always put country over party when it comes to governing in Washington DC," he does not always agree with Caucus positions.⁵ For example, Reed has voted in accordance with President Trump’s views 96% of the time and stood firmly with the conservatives in his party when it came to tax reform.⁶ During

¹ Information obtained from Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Problem_Solvers_Caucus and from Ballotpedia, <https://ballotpedia.org/Ballotpedia:About>

² Information obtained from the No Labels website, www.nolabels.org and its Frequently Asked Questions page of information about the Problem Solvers Caucus, <https://www.nolabels.org/faq-congressional-problem-solvers/#>

³ No Labels history page <https://www.nolabels.org/History/>

⁴ <https://www.democratandchronicle.com/story/news/politics/2017/08/11/divided-congress-reed-tries-something-different-bipartisanship/559180001/>

⁵ "Bipartisan group wants clean spending bill". *CNN*. Retrieved 2018-03-19. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/04/24/politics/problem-solvers-caucus-spending-bill-government-shutdown/index.html>

⁶ https://projects.fivethirtyeight.com/congress-trump-score/house/?ex_cid=rrpromo

negotiations on the December 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, New Jersey Problem Solvers Caucus members Republican Rep. Leonard Lance and Democratic Rep. Josh Gottheimer proposed a way to maintain the original state and local tax deduction (SALT), a proposal which would have benefited New Yorkers.⁷ Reed opposed their proposal.

The Caucus' signature success to date occurred on July 31, 2017, when its members unified behind a bipartisan health care fix to shore up the nation's struggling health insurance exchanges and to reduce premiums for individuals, families, and small businesses. The Washington Post described the Caucus plan as "a viable bipartisan compromise focused on stabilizing health-care markets rather than enforcing one party's will on the nation."⁸ Among other suggestions, the plan would have increased the size of companies mandated to provide health coverage from 50 to 500. The plan was never introduced in the House.

Congressman Reed frequently touts the work of the group, but its legislative successes are few. In reality, the Caucus has aligned only a few times on votes and on policy including:

- Support and vote into law a "clean" continuing resolution—free of any ideological riders—to avert a government shutdown (April 2017).⁹ It passed the House and Senate to provide a one-week extension for budget negotiations;
- Release of a comprehensive bipartisan proposal to rebuild American infrastructure (January 2018)¹⁰;
- Release of a bipartisan immigration proposal in the House; pairing a long-term solution for The Dreamers with investments in border security (January 2018)¹¹; and
- Support for the long-term budget deal that averted another government shutdown and could not have passed without the Problem Solvers' bipartisan votes (February 2018).¹²

None of these efforts, except for the one-week budget extension, resulted in legislation.

⁷ <https://www.politico.com/states/new-jersey/story/2017/12/05/gottheimer-and-lance-make-last-ditch-effort-to-save-salt-deduction-133711>

⁸ https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/finally-a-real-plan-to-fix-obamacare/2017/07/31/a2d26476-7632-11e7-9eac-d56bd5568db8_story.html?utm_term=.064b87798c3b

⁹ "Bipartisan group wants clean spending bill." *CNN*. Retrieved 2018-03-19. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/04/24/politics/problem-solvers-caucus-spending-bill-government-shutdown/index.html>

¹⁰ "Bipartisan group of lawmakers offers ideas for infrastructure plan." *The Hill*. Retrieved 2018-03-19.

<http://thehill.com/policy/transportation/infrastructure/368334-bipartisan-group-of-lawmakers-unveil-infrastructure>

¹¹ "Bipartisan House group unveils new DACA proposal". *CNN*. Retrieved 2018-03-19.

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/01/29/politics/daca-bipartisan-deal-problem-solvers/index.html>

¹² "Bipartisanship in Washington is actually happening". Retrieved 2018-03-19. <https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/27/opinions/rep-bipartisanship-in-washington-is-happening-opinion-reed-gottheimer/index.html>