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## Reed & Gottheimer Lead Bipartisan Effort to Find Common Ground in Washington

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WASHINGTON, DC – With public trust in government near an all-time low, the Franklin Center and The Ripon Society held a breakfast discussion this past Thursday morning with two Members of Congress who are leading a bipartisan effort to reverse that trend and make government work.

The Members were Republican Congressman Tom Reed of New York and Democratic Congressman Josh Gottheimer of New Jersey. The pair serve as Co-Chairs of the Problem Solvers Caucus, a bipartisan group of just over 40 Representatives who are trying to find common ground on some of the key challenges facing America today.

“The Problem Solvers Caucus is maybe the last hope for what we can do to break the gridlock here,” Reed stated. “As a voting bloc, we’ve now gone to Problem Solvers Caucus 2.0, where we weeded out the folks that were just talking the talk. We had some members previously who would come and maybe not even come, but back in their districts all of a sudden they were the ‘Problem Solvers Members of the Year’ in their campaigns. And I’m like, ‘Wow, I never saw you at any of the coffees.’ At the end of the day, we weeded it down to get members who want to not just talk the talk, but walk the walk.”

“We implemented in our bylaws amendments to get a voting bloc put together when we get to a consensus position. We’ve locked arms with each other and we’ll vote together. As we learned from our friends in the Freedom Caucus -- and give them the credit that’s due to them – when they vote as a bloc, they can influence this place. One of the things we’re trying to do is be an antidote to that in regards to making sure we’re governing for the American people -- that we’re not having shutdowns, we’re not having debt ceiling crises, and we’re advancing the American agenda when it comes to tax reform and infrastructure.”

Gottheimer echoed Reed’s remarks.

“I ran for Congress for the same reason I think Tom originally ran -- to actually do things,” the New Jersey Democrat observed. “I, like most of us, am sick and tired of people coming here and obstructing for the sake of obstructing and not trying to get things done. I fundamentally believe people hire you and they vote for you and they expect you to do a job, and there are things that need to get done for the country -- whether it’s tax reform and infrastructure or reform in other areas that I know we can find common ground on...”

“We’re up to 22 Democrats and 22 Republicans.... You have to actually be in. We’re going to vote together. Are you willing to not just pay dues, but not go into the districts of other people in the caucus and campaign against them? Because we won’t do that. It’s part of our bylaws. We don’t go into the districts of other members. How are you supposed to trust somebody and look at them if you suddenly show up in their district and campaign against them and write checks against them? No one will really trust you or want to sit at the table with you.”



Reed has served in Congress since 2011, while Gottheimer was elected to his first term this past year. When the Problem Solvers Caucus was formed this past February, the two were elected Co-Chairmen. Since that time, they have worked to increase the number of Members in the group. In May, they also helped guide the group to its legislative [victory](#) when Caucus Members voted en bloc to oppose a government shutdown and support the FY’17 funding bill.

In light of their growing numbers and growing influence, the pair were asked about their relationship with both House Leadership and the White House and how their effort to forge a bipartisan consensus were being received.

“I won't speak for him on that,” Reed said, referring to House Speaker Paul Ryan, “but I think what we represent is an alternative path. I mean, he's got his own problems with our own internal division in the conference -- that's obvious. It's out there, it's open, and it's something that I think you can live in denial about or you can take head-on. And I think what we offer them is a potential alternative path than going further to the extremes.”

As for the President, Reed – who was one of the first Members of Congress to support the Trump campaign – said he thought the former businessmen would be supportive of the Problem Solver’s results-oriented approach.

“He is a deal maker,” the New York Republican said matter of factly. “He wants to cut a deal. And I think he's going through the process of trying to deal with some of our friends in the Conference who continuously move the goal post once a deal is reached.” At the same time, Reed continued: “I know the President is welcoming Democratic Members down at the White House, and those members are members such as us in the Caucus who have demonstrated a commitment to advancing the agenda for America.”

Reed also noted that Steve Munchin met with the Problem Solvers shortly after being sworn in as Treasury Secretary. “The first group of members he came up to see was us,” he revealed. “And he's only been there twice. So I think there is a sincere look at us in the sense of, 'If you guys are real and you're sincere, we want to work with you and embrace you.’”

Gottheimer agreed, and added that the group’s strength rested not only in its Members’ decision to vote together, but their willingness to work with both sides.

“You have to be willing to engage and have the conversation,” he stated. “If you don't have a seat at the table, you can't be upset that what comes out isn't exactly what you wanted if you're not actually putting your voice into it.”

The pair were also asked if they were prepared to withstand the political pressure they could face if the Caucus keeps increasing in numbers and its political influence continues to grow.

“That's what I came here for,” Reed declared. “I don't mind that pressure. If I'm part of the solution, and if I have to bear that pressure, I'm fine with that. I'm fine with also -- being perfectly blunt with you -- if I get done what I came here to get done and it costs me this [Congressional] pin. I'd give it up in a heartbeat. This doesn't define me. I know some Members that it does. They couldn't live unless they had this on their lapel. I'm more than willing to take that pressure and go forward.

“I will tell you there are more and more Members who silently come up to us who feel the same way. They are tired of this gridlock, and they want to be a part of that voice -- to be the fulcrum -- to get things done. At the end of the day, if you're here just to get doors opened for you and be driven around town, maybe you're not the right Member to be here given the nature of the problems we face in this country.”

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