

**HOW TO**



**TALK**

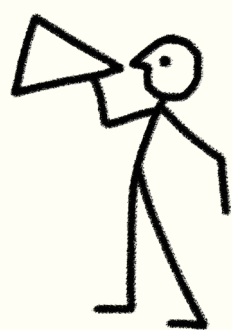
**ABOUT**



**POLITICS**

**BY NO LABELS**






**NO LABELS**



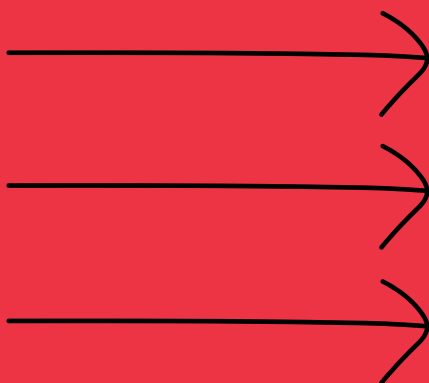
# HOW TO BECOME A WARRIOR FOR ✦ **UNITY** ✦ IN AMERICA



Conversation is how we learn to understand, respect, and live alongside other people. But in America, we no longer know how to talk to one another about politics.

That's why No Labels wrote this book. We want to empower a rising generation of Americans to bridge the divides and bring people together to solve our biggest problems. We spoke to young people and college students across America to understand their fears, their hopes and their ideas for reviving our democracy. The result is this booklet, which we hope you'll use as your guide to becoming a warrior for unity in America.

# HOW TO:



**(OUR GETTING-STARTED TABLE OF CONTENTS)**

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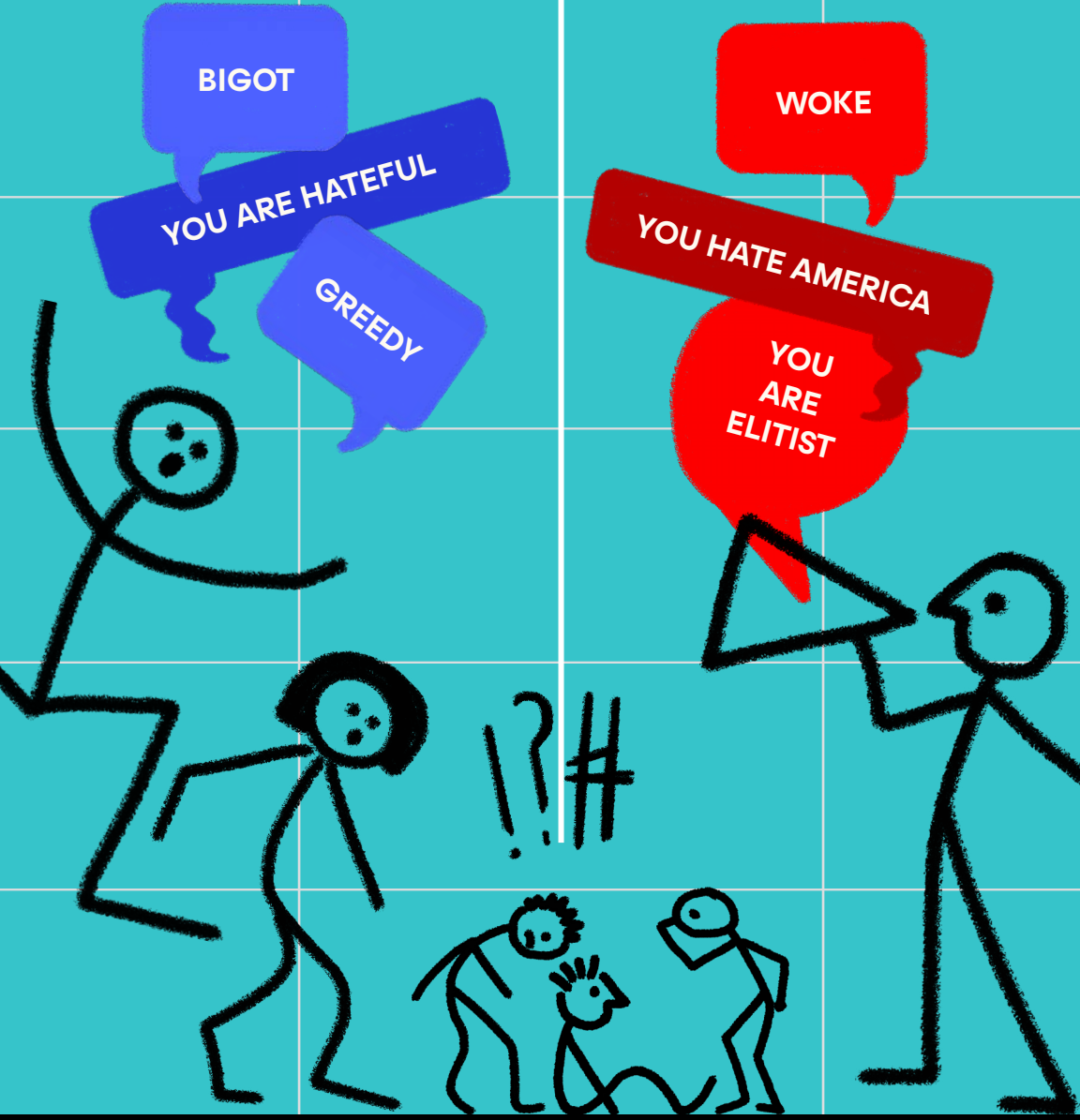
HOW TO

# UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEM



01






LEFT

RIGHT

Whether it's about immigration, taxes, spending, guns, healthcare, or education, it isn't long before the attacks start.

What's happening on college campuses, in school board meetings, in households and even between friends and family is the same thing that's happening in Washington and throughout our political system. The loudest and most extreme voices have taken over the room. Reason and persuasion are out. Shouting and intimidation are in.

And it's getting dangerous.



I'm afraid  
we'll have  
another  
civil war.



As our biggest problems go unsolved and frustration builds, we hear talk about states seceding and America breaking apart. We're losing faith in our democracy and in one another. And our trust in government is now the lowest it has been since pollsters started measuring it over 60 years ago.

But Americans have persevered through much tougher times before, and we can do it again if we rediscover the spirit of common purpose and cooperation that has sustained our democracy for almost 250 years.



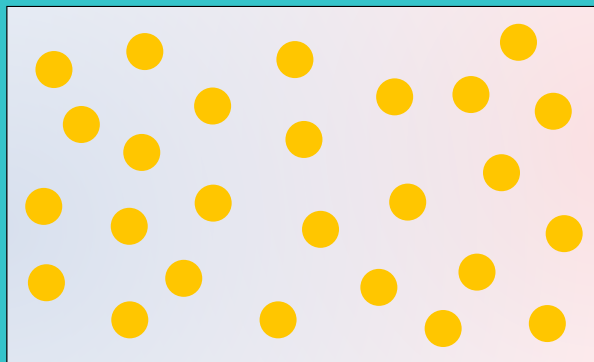
WHY IS IT  
SO HARD  
TO HAVE  
CONVERSATIONS  
ABOUT  
IDEAS OR  
POLITICS?

Ours has always been a nation full of different people from different places and of so many different races and religions. Today, there are 330 million people who call America home.

A country this big and diverse can't sustain itself if one faction or party keeps trying to impose its will on the others. We urgently need to rediscover how to collaborate and find common ground.

That's the work that No Labels has been doing for over a decade. We exist to solve the country's biggest problems, and we know they'll only be solved with a can-do approach. We believe excellent minds lie on the left, right and center of our political spectrum, and when they can respect each other's point of view, only good things happen.

## WHERE ARE THE EXCELLENT MINDS?



LEFT

RIGHT

● — EXCELLENT MINDS

We've built a group of allies in Congress, developed ideas and a network of citizens who believe in the promise and the urgency of our mission. Together they are creating a space where real solutions can be forged.

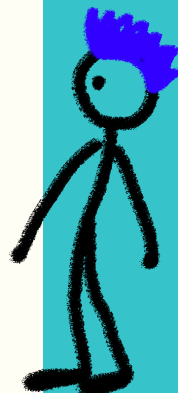
Now, we want you to join us. Each generation of Americans has been called on to overcome monumental challenges around the world and here at home. This generation's greatest challenge is overcoming and transcending the dangerously partisan politics holding our country back. No Labels is building a movement of modern thinkers and doers who want to work together in the public interest and deliver change.

If this sounds like you, then we hope you will join a group of citizen leaders that No Labels is building out across the country. Our National Citizen Corps features people in every state, in diverse communities and on college campuses across America. These leaders recognize that change won't happen on its own and they are taking the initiative to be evangelists and organizers for the No Labels movement. They have an opportunity to not only grow this movement but to shape its direction in the future.

If you choose to embrace our mission, and to join our National Citizen Corps, this booklet can be your guide. It will help you better understand the forces that are driving us apart, how you can help bring people together and the changes we can all make to unite America.

I'm afraid my friends will judge me.

I'm afraid that what I say will hurt my grade.



# IT ALL STARTS WITH A CONVERSATION



America faces enormous hurdles. Energy security and climate change. Immigration. Crime, and criminal justice reform. Debt and deficits. And the foreboding feeling younger Americans have that their generation won't have the same opportunities their parents and grandparents had.

Throughout American history, these are the moments when Democrats and Republicans found a way to come together to pass legislation and create change that **made a difference in the lives of generations of Americans.** Working in good faith across their differences in the 1960s, America's leaders passed the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts. In the 1980s, they saved Social Security. In the 1990s, they balanced the budget and subsequently rose up to defend the nation after 9/11. In just the past few years, Washington managed to pass essential and bipartisan COVID relief, which included a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures, and the biggest infrastructure bill in 60 years; bills expected to create 1.5 million jobs a year for the next 10 years.

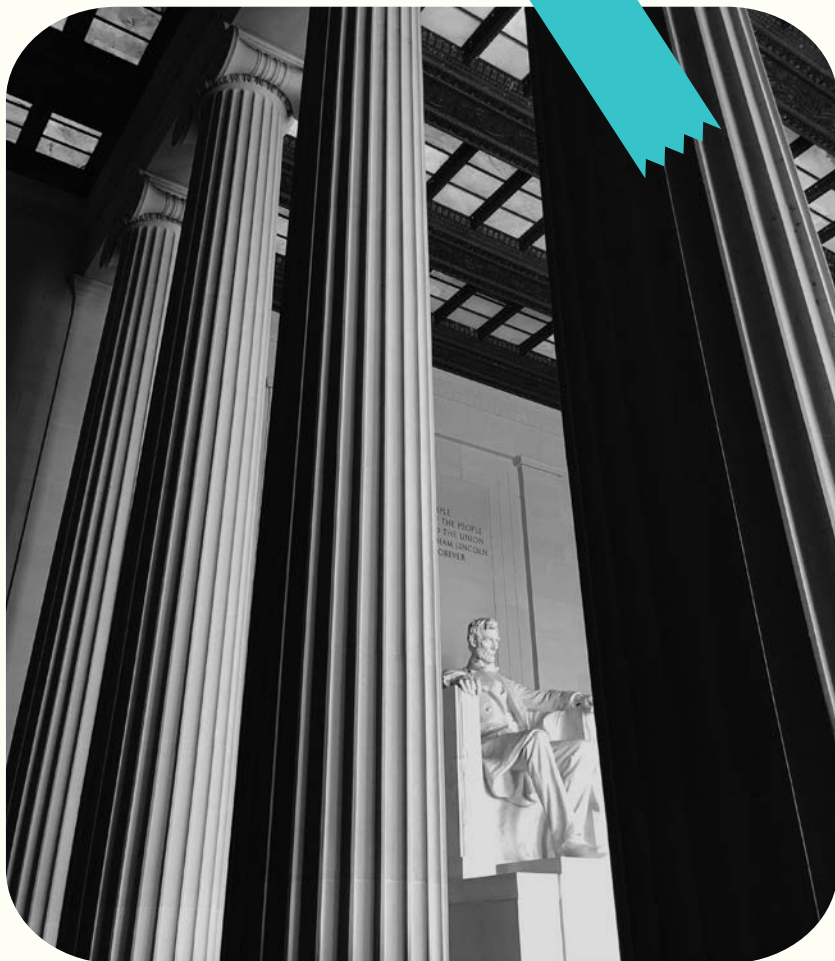


Because two parties accomplished this together, these changes, like almost all bipartisan efforts, are more likely to stand the test of time.

In each and every case, this progress was possible because very different people, with very different ideas, were willing to sit across a table from one another and have a conversation. That's where it all starts.



# WHY WE NEED YOU



Washington will start to change for the better when Americans all across the country stand up to demand better.



We know that speaking up is a risk. We know the easiest and most comfortable thing is just sticking with your political tribe and keeping your head down. But if more people leaned into their natural curiosity, respect, and drive to find common ground in order to get things done, everything would change. People might finally find others around whom they feel comfortable expressing their political views.

Democracy depends on our collective ability to maintain a balance between partisanship and collaboration.

## WE NEED

To be able to disagree without being shouted down.

To explore new ideas without risking backlash or even expulsion from our friends, our fellow students and colleagues.

A national movement to reawaken respect, empathy, conversation and collaboration.

This is the movement that No Labels is leading.

The genius of the American system of government is that in a society full of factions, it becomes more than the sum of its parts. But this magic of diversity is predicated on the willingness of those with open minds to keep speaking up, to keep stepping up. Because the only thing crazier than trying to fix the problems in a big system, is to think that they will fix themselves without anyone's help.

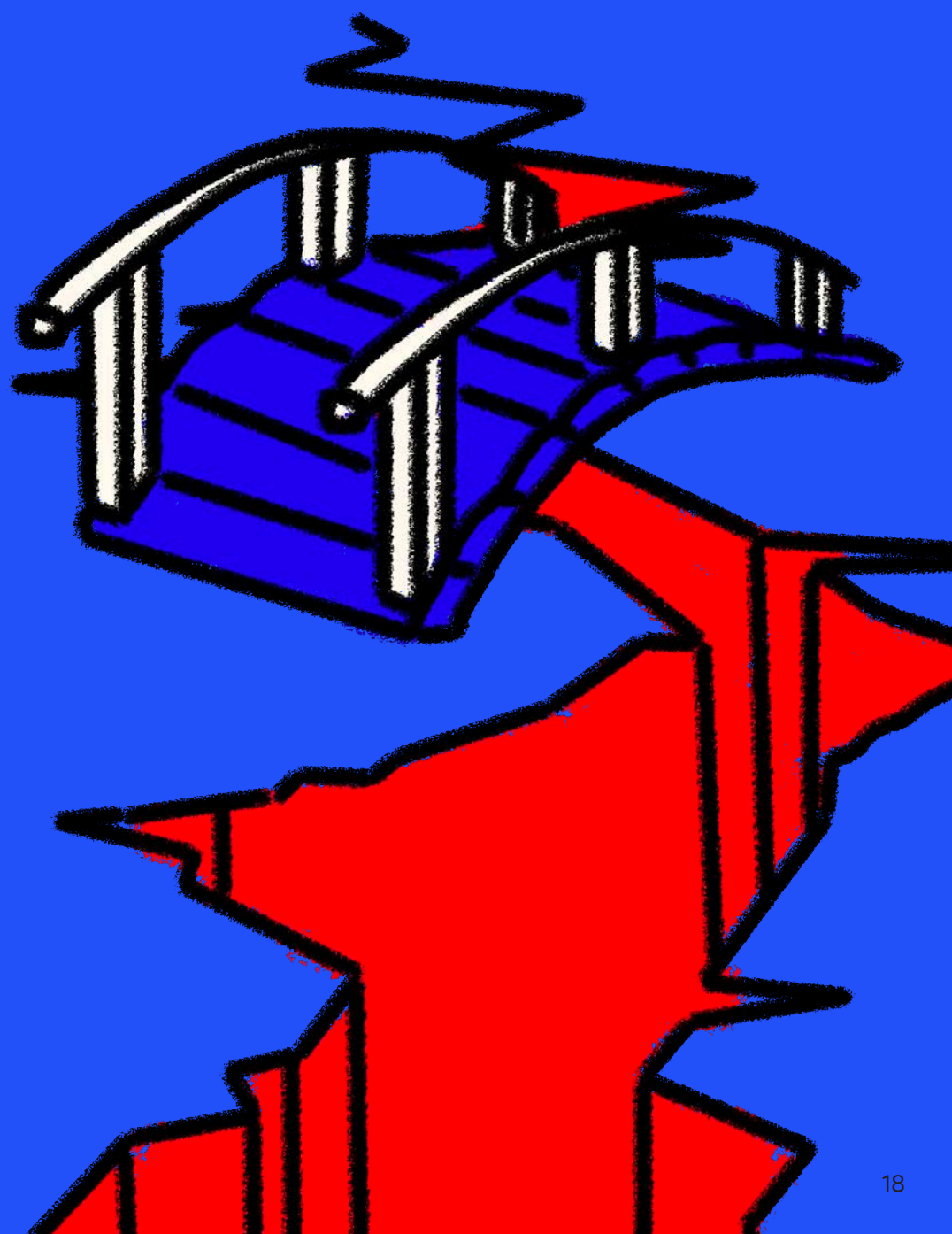
I'm afraid of how easy it is to be mean to each other, and how casually cruel we are becoming.



**HOW TO**

**SOLVE  
THE  
PROBLEM**

**02**



# WHY TALKING POLITICS TAKES PRACTICE



WHAT HAPPENED TODAY

WHAT YOU REMEMBER



17 GOOD THINGS

1 BAD THING

1 BAD THING

It won't be easy to overcome  
the anger and division  
consuming our politics  
because in many ways our  
brains are built for it.

Our brains have what some researchers call “Velcro for negativity” and “Teflon for positivity.” Bad, scary, and even difficult stuff rivets our attention because the brain produces neurochemicals that are literally addictive. It’s a stress response built for survival in the wild. See a predator? Don’t forget where, run and tell everyone (thus, the origin of gossip). Even though we aren’t living in the wild anymore, our brains haven’t changed that much. So, screaming match? Remember every detail. Pleasant conversation? *Oh yeah. When was that?* Quiet doesn’t draw the brain’s attention. Neither does compromise or collaboration. Boring. Political parties and the media know this and they make sure they stoke those neurochemical fires—anger and hatred get more views and more clicks than demonstrating the ability to work together.

It would be nice if we could prevail upon the extremes to just stand down. It would be great if we could get the “words are violence” and “f\*ck your feelings” crowds to dial back their outrage stampedes. But the reality is they’re addicted, they’re bought in and, let’s be honest, they’re eager to stir the pot.

I'm afraid I  
won't be free  
to think.



So that leaves it to the rest of us. *We* need to be the ones of goodwill and courage, with a willingness to accept some discomfort and, above all, a plan to take the lead.

When we've managed to work through a difficult problem—say, finding compromise with someone who has a totally different view of the same challenge—it almost always turns out to feel better than an anger hangover. Surviving disagreement makes for solid bonds. That's why, in many cases, strong relationships form between people who disagree on important topics.

I wish we could have more nuanced conversations instead of it being all or nothing.



So how do we start to turn things around? It begins with the confidence that it is possible for people with very different ideas about politics to find **common ground.**



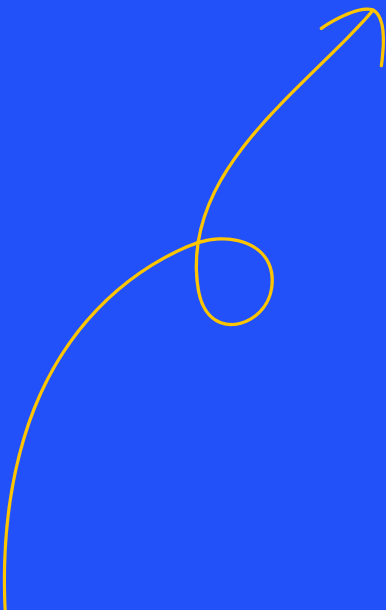
We are a nation of innovators. The robustness of the American imagination and problem-solving capability comes from the contributions of the many cultures and perspectives that make us the country that we are. And in the midst of this diversity, it's amazing how much Americans do agree on. If more of our elected officials actually made the effort to talk to one another, and to reflect the will of the great American majority, here's how they could come together to deliver commonsense solutions on just a few key issues.



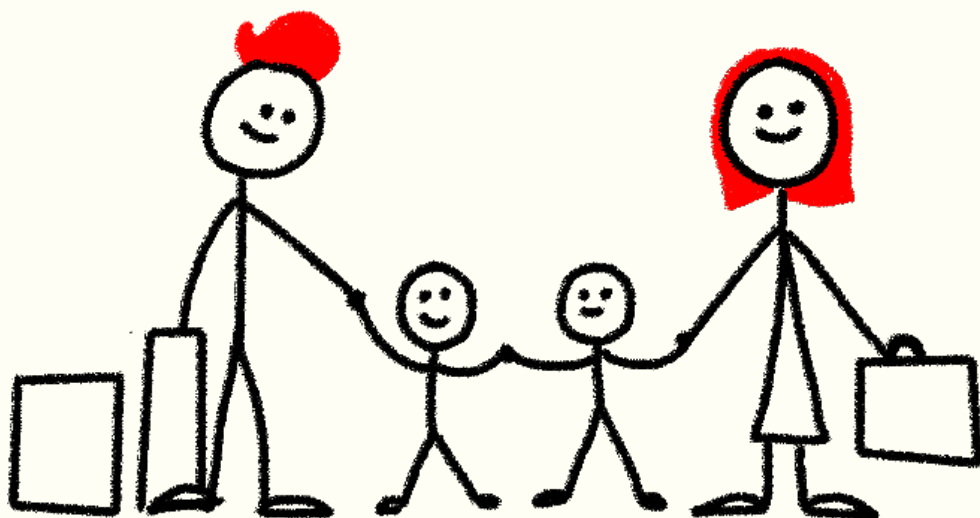
# UNITY ISSUES



Here's what  
unity looks like  
on just a few  
key issues.



# THE UNITY ISSUE 01: IMMIGRATION



Most Americans consider immigration a “good thing” for our country. Immigrants are job creators and twice as likely to start a new business as a native-born. Half of all Fortune 500 companies were started by immigrants or their children.

But almost two million undocumented migrants reached the southern border in 2021, and along with this being an all-time high, Americans’ concern over illegal immigration is also at a two-decade high. This puts a significant strain on border areas—just six states account for the majority of all undocumented immigrants in the U.S—and providing healthcare and education to illegal immigrants can strain state and local budgets.

## The Commonsense Solution

Congress passes immigration reform that both secures the border to stop illegal immigration and encourages legal immigration.

# THE UNITY ISSUE 02: ENERGY AND CLIMATE



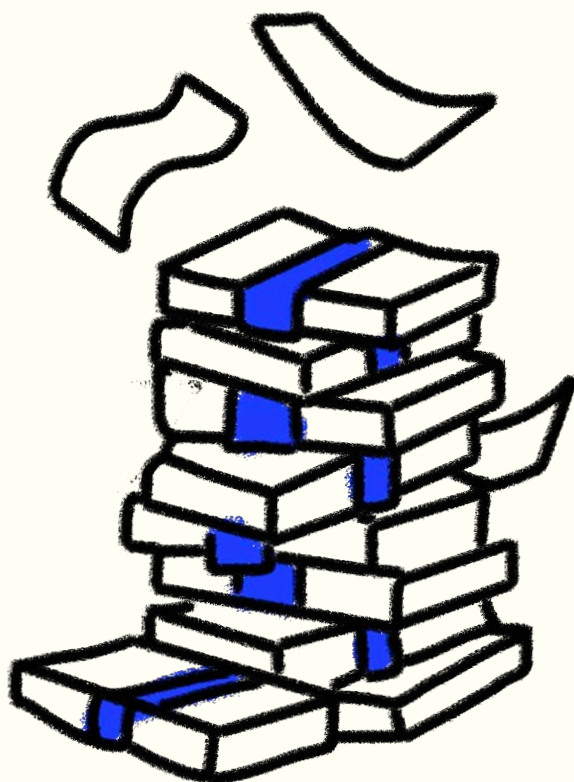
Most likely U.S. voters believe the U.S. government should encourage increased oil and gas production to reduce America's dependence on foreign sources of energy and bring the prices down.

But a majority of Americans are also “alarmed or concerned about climate change.” Every decade since the 1980s has been hotter than the previous one, and they would like to see us move towards alternative energy choices.

## The Commonsense Solution

America takes an all-of-the-above energy approach now to both protect the security of our country and the economic well-being of families, while also making massive investments in the breakthrough energy technologies (advanced batteries and nuclear reactors, carbon capture) that will protect our planet in the future.

# THE UNITY ISSUE 03: THE NATIONAL DEBT



Early in 2022, the Treasury Department reported that America’s total national debt cleared \$30 trillion for the first time ever. To get a sense of how big that number is—it’s bigger as a share of our economy than at any time since World War II. If you stacked \$30 billion of \$10 bills, you would almost reach the moon.

Two-thirds of Americans believe the national debt is “an unfair legacy we are leaving to our children” and they are right to feel that way. Because every year the government has to spend more on interest payments on that debt, and that means there won’t be as much money to spend on the problems you might want to fix, like climate, education, healthcare and infrastructure.

## The Commonsense Solution

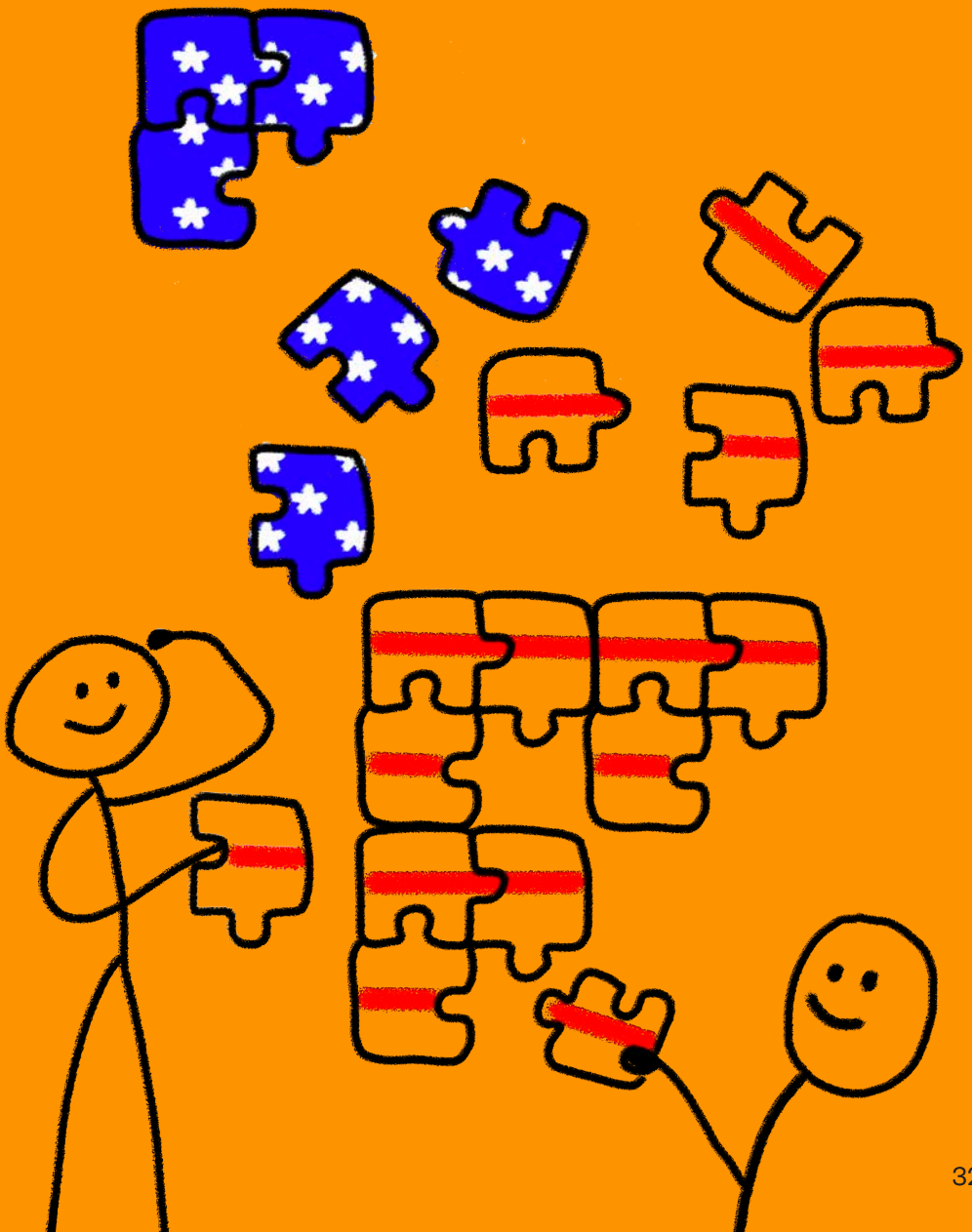
This is not an impossible challenge. Getting America’s finances in order does not mean that the government’s revenues and expenses must be in complete balance every year. It does mean the trajectory of our budget needs to change. To do it, Washington could implement a public debt/GDP limit that could only be violated with a formal Declaration of War or a supermajority vote of both houses of Congress and the signature of the president.

This proposal does not tell Congress how to get our fiscal house in order, and it does not require members to go on the record to support specific budget cuts and revenue increases. It does, however, require Congress to better align spending and revenues over an appropriate period of time.

# HOW TO WORK TOGETHER

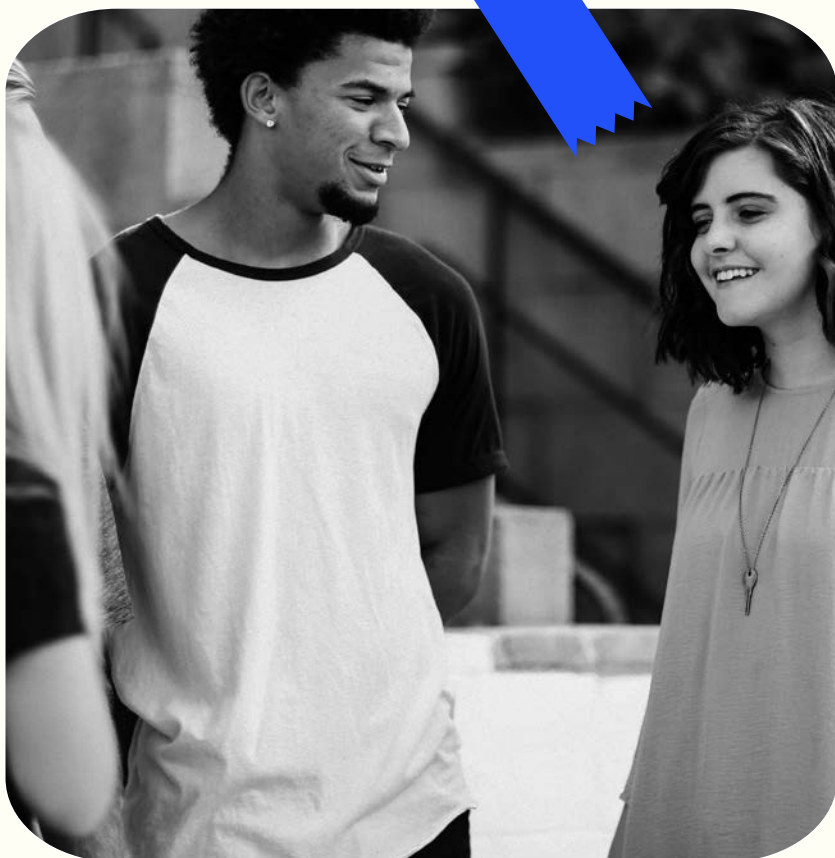
03





# IT CAN BE DONE. WE HAVE PROOF.

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At No Labels, we are about creating effective and productive relationships. We believe collaboration begins with trust and trust begins with conversation.

And the lack of conversation in Washington is a significant source of our government's problems.

Shortly after we launched in 2010, we began speaking with Democrats and Republicans in Congress and many told us they barely knew or spoke to members of the other party.

It was a clarifying moment in which we realized just how dysfunctional our government had become. After all, how could these members possibly work together to solve tough issues if they didn't have any personal relationships with one another? So we started hosting meetings over coffee where members could talk about both the personal and political.

It wasn't easy but over time these meetings built trust, led to legislation and ultimately to something that had never before existed on Capitol Hill: The creation of a durable bipartisan bloc committed to getting to "yes" on key issues. It's called the Problem Solvers Caucus and it features over 50 members, equally divided between Democrats and Republicans.

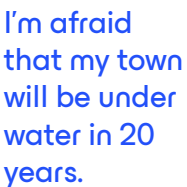
I'm afraid  
I won't  
recognize our  
country in  
20 years.



After No Labels organized the House, we started doing similar work to bring Senators together. And then we took it a step further and started bringing together House and Senate members from both parties.

You might not have read much about this growing alliance of Democratic and Republican House and Senate members because the media doesn't care much to report on cooperation these days. But these leaders are the force that helped ensure the passage of the 2022 gun safety bill – the first federal gun bill in almost 30 years – as well as the 2021 infrastructure bill, a 2020 land and water conservation bill that was the biggest in U.S. history and a landmark 2018 criminal justice reform bill.

As dysfunctional as Washington has often been, whenever there's been a bipartisan breakthrough, you can be sure No Labels and its House and Senate allies were part of the process.



I'm afraid that my town will be under water in 20 years.



# PASSING A BILL WITH NO LABELS

HOUSE DEMOCRATS

HOUSE REPUBLICANS

SENATE DEMOCRATS

SENATE REPUBLICANS



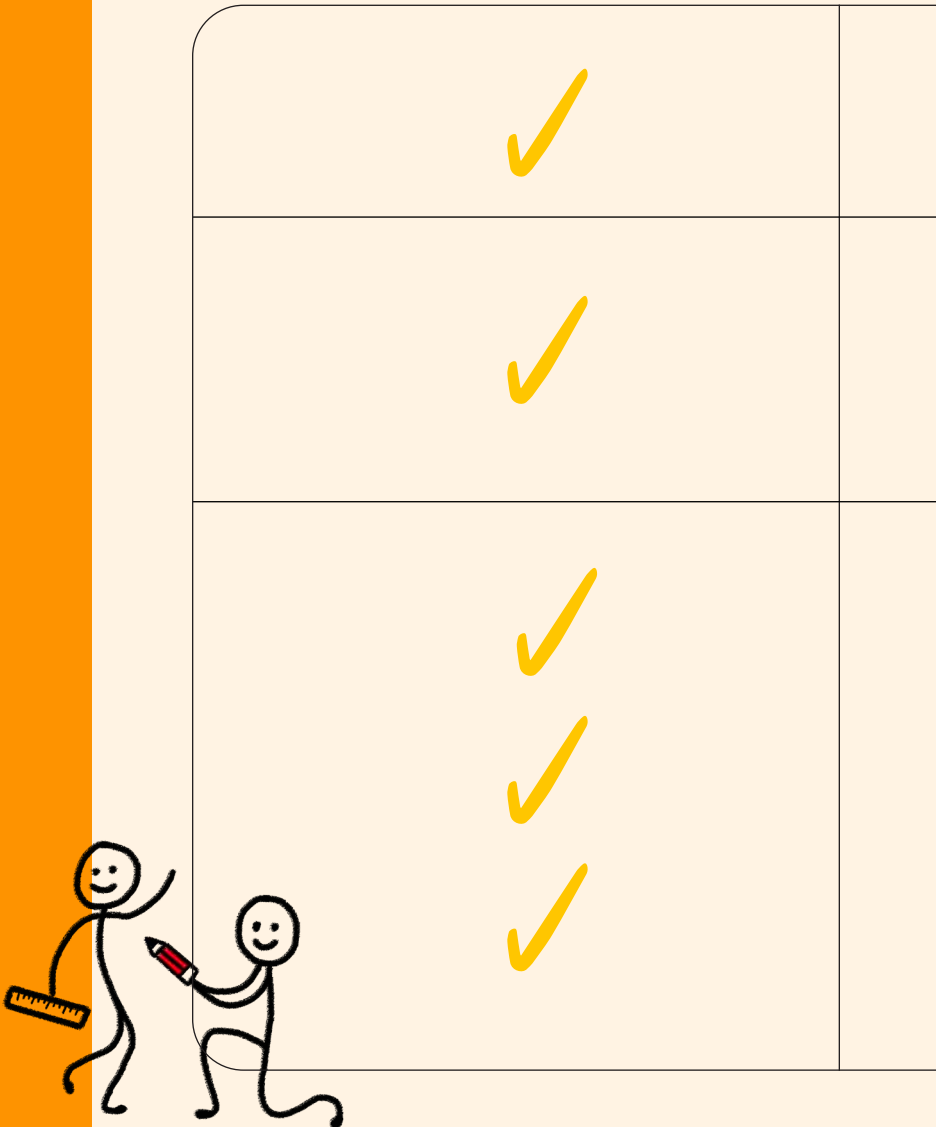
BILLS PASSED

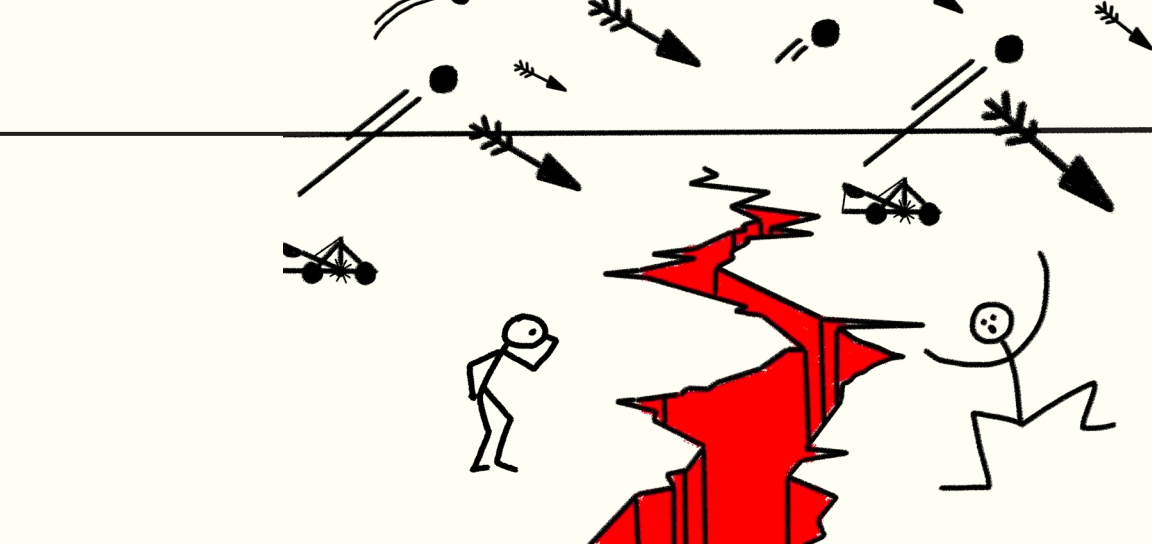
2022 GUN SAFETY BILL

2021 INFRASTRUCTURE BILL

2020 LAND AND WATER  
CONSERVATION BILL

You have the power to do what No Labels did in Congress on your college campus, in your community and among your friends and family. Here's how to start reaching across lines so that civil and productive political debate becomes normal again:





Identify a person you can reasonably disagree with.

Agree to the ground rules of the debate with an emphasis on mutual respect; work at creating specifics together.

Find common ground.

Beginner


Identify something you have in common as human beings

Intermediate

Express what you're both worried about, i.e., "I'm afraid" statements

Advanced

Find an issue you both agree needs to be solved but on which you each have different views and/or solutions




That the debt I'll inherit means  
we won't have anything left to  
spend on things I care about

I'M AFRAID



To walk down the  
street at night



Of getting attacked by  
a criminal who doesn't  
belong on the street

I'M AFRAID

I'M AFRAID



To have kids because  
I am scared they won't  
have a future





That we won't do enough  
to save the climate



**I'M AFRAID**

**I'M AFRAID**



That my town will be  
under water in 20 years




I won't recognize our  
country in 20 years




Of getting stopped  
by the police



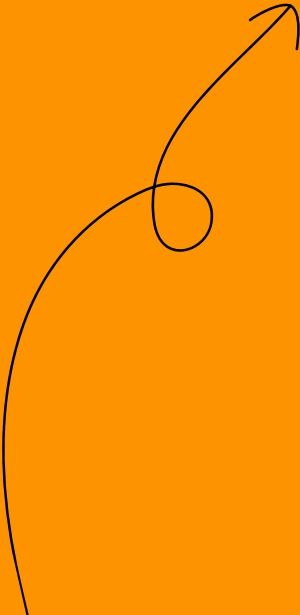
**I'M AFRAID**



Of our lack of  
humanity to  
outsiders and  
to one another



# Tips on the tough topics and how to really connect



A black and white photograph of the United States Capitol building in Washington, D.C. The image focuses on the large, ornate dome, which is topped by a statue of Liberty. The dome's surface is covered in a grid of ribs, and it features a series of arched windows. Below the dome, the building's facade is visible, showing classical columns and a balcony. The sky is a uniform, dark grey. Overlaid on the center of the image is the text "TALKING POLITICS" in a large, white, sans-serif font.

# TALKING POLITICS

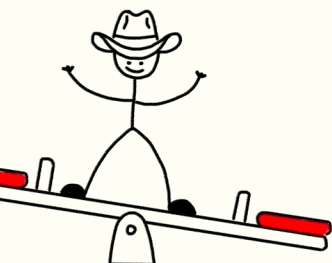
## 1

# Prepare to Resist Temptation

It's all too easy to get caught in an emotional vortex. It takes preparation and practice to resist temptation. *Before* beginning to engage in respectful disagreement, take time to prepare. Breathe. Use a meditation app. Work out. Take a walk. Talk with a trusted friend.

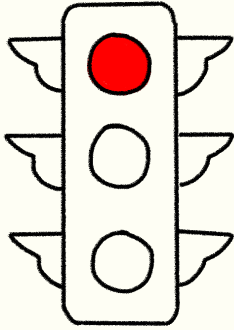
Think about motives. Is it more important to be right? To win? Or to learn? Build trust?

It's not always easy to stay balanced especially when cave-person brain gets into the tribal game, so keep these symptoms in mind.



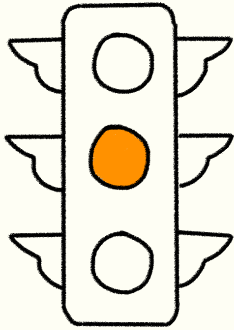
## Listening Skills

Set timers so that each person has two minutes to speak. During those two minutes, be present, maintain relaxed breathing, and keep your eyes focused so no one is tempted to believe you're thinking "*how soon can I get out of here?*". Resist the impulse to say "uh huh," "yeah" or any other conversation-hurrying sound. Don't rush to fill in pauses. Start with two-minute turns listening and speaking. As you get more comfortable, bump it up to 5 and even 10 minutes.



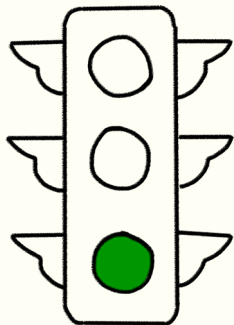
### Red light, walk away

*I can't think, I feel like I'm going to explode, I can't stand their ideas and they are wrecking everything. They are just wrong. Remedy: Either reexamine your choice of person to speak to or table the conversation for another day.*



### Yellow light, ask for a breather

*I'm already irritated by the conversation and it hasn't even happened. I'm just barely keeping it together, and I'm thinking the other person is a jerk. Use one of the strategies like walking, working out, connecting with a friend, watching your breath to get into the green zone.*



### Green light, keep going

*I'm finding my way back to feeling relaxed and open to what I'm hearing even if I don't agree. I can access feelings of respect for the other's worries and points of view.*

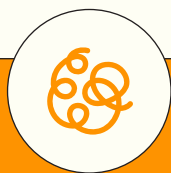
## 2

# Be Honest About Your Audience

Don't worry about reaching the most militant on either side of the debate. But there are lots of people who can have a respectful conversation.

*That's your community.*

NOT THIS ONE



## Emotions

When you feel uneasy with what the other person is saying, acknowledge that you heard what they said by reflecting it back calmly, as in "I hear you saying that ... ." Then relax your face, and with sincere curiosity, make this kind of request: "Can you help me understand what you mean/how this works/why it's important ... ." And don't be snarky about it.

# Commit To a Few, Simple Rules of Engagement

Stay away from mosh pits. Look for those who might have different views but are reasonable and begin engaging them in small groups, or one-on-one. Eventually, it will get easier to participate in more dynamic and contentious situations; at some point maybe even calm down others.

The goal is to create an environment defined by curiosity and respect. That means giving others time and space to present their ideas, unfettered, before you begin to respond.



## Environment

If you can, walk and talk in a calm setting. Walking helps calm the nervous system by stimulating both sides of the brain.

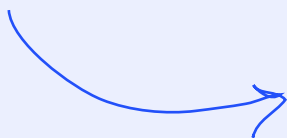
# FINDING COMMON GROUND

## Getting Started

Don't dive into a political discussion—establish some common ground first. Try starting by bringing up your favorite books as a kid, favorite movies, music, sports, classes, pizza. And if you like different things, it's a good place to discover that you can disagree and still get along.



## Cultivating Curiosity



If they like something you don't, ask, with genuine curiosity, for them to talk about why they like it so much. Even if your companion hates your favorite song, you can tell them why it lifts your mood or opens your heart.

## Next Steps

Everyone has things they are worried about. They might be different concerns, but empathy and understanding are key to productive conversation. Talk about yours, listen to theirs.

Focus on language that shows acknowledgement of a different viewpoint while still holding your position.

"I see why you feel that way, but my view is that ... ."

"That's a fair point, but ... ."

Ask a few questions when you disagree.

"I see, but how would that work in practice?"

"Why do you feel that's the best solution?"

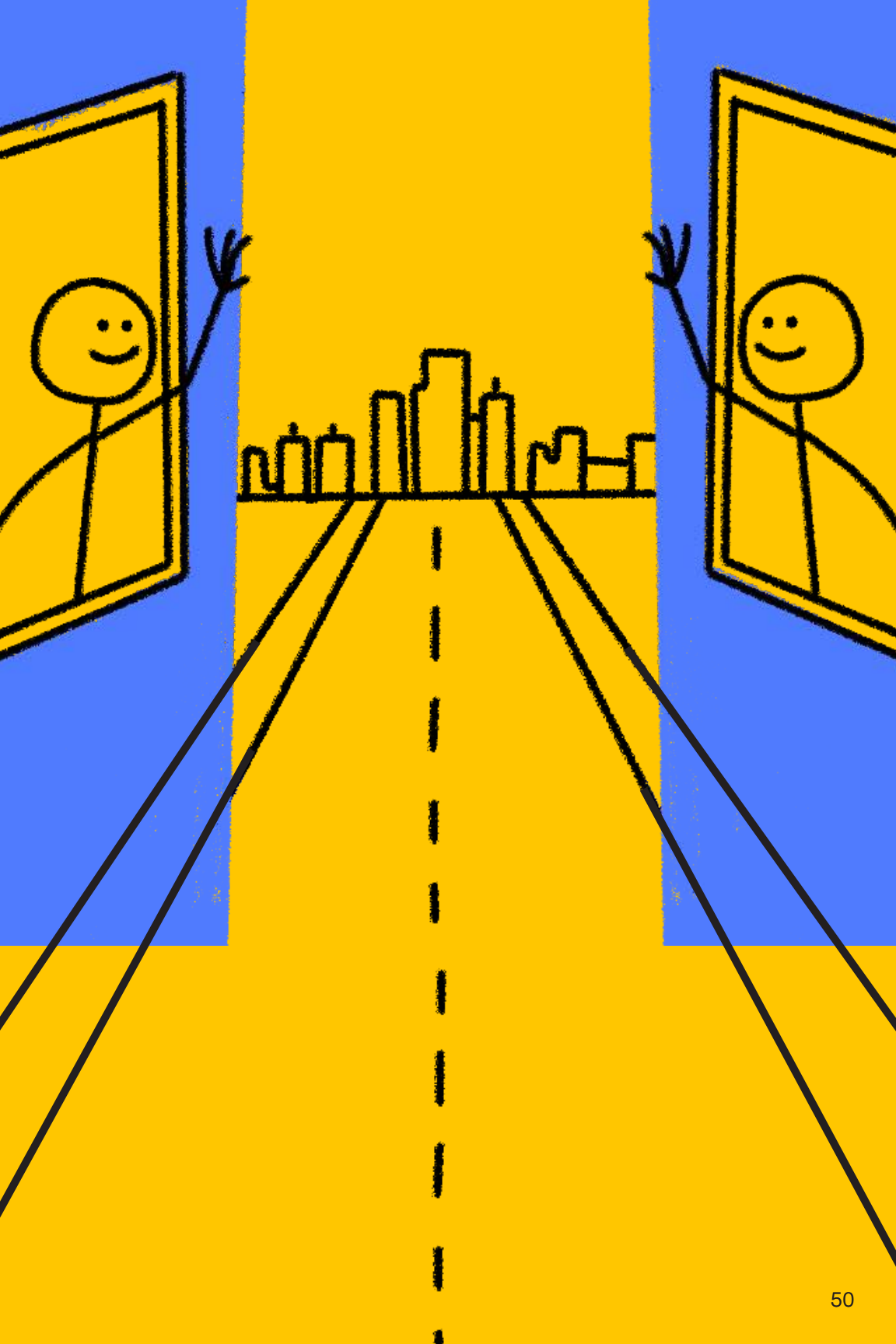
Be sincere.

The human brain picks up the emotions of others easily, and when it doesn't align with our words, others will register us as disingenuous.

HOW TO

# JOIN THE MOVEMENT

04



# BECOME A WARRIOR FOR **UNITY**



We think it's time to bring to life a new honor code that returns dignity not only to American politics, but also to our own communities.

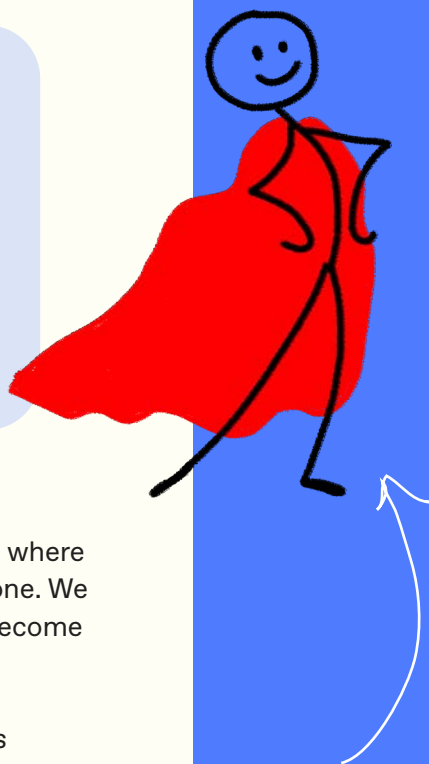
For the past decade, No Labels has tirelessly and selflessly worked hard to bring the country and the two parties together. And it is working. Even though Washington may seem broken, we, and our allies in Congress have proved collaboration can work.

We at No Labels believe the defining challenges of our time can only be solved when Americans from across the political spectrum come together.

Yet we've now come to a moment in history, where the challenge is so big that we can't do it alone. We need millions of Americans just like you to become a part of this movement.

So much of what we shared in this booklet is about how you, as an individual, can start to have political conversations grounded in trust, empathy and respect. There's a lot you can do on your own to rebuild our democracy.

But you can do so much more as part of the No Labels movement and as a leader in our National Citizen Corps. We need you to actively get involved and help us build coalitions that offer – and then deliver – concrete results. You can take the exact same approach in your community that No Labels took to build the House Problem Solvers Caucus and our bipartisan coalition in the Senate.



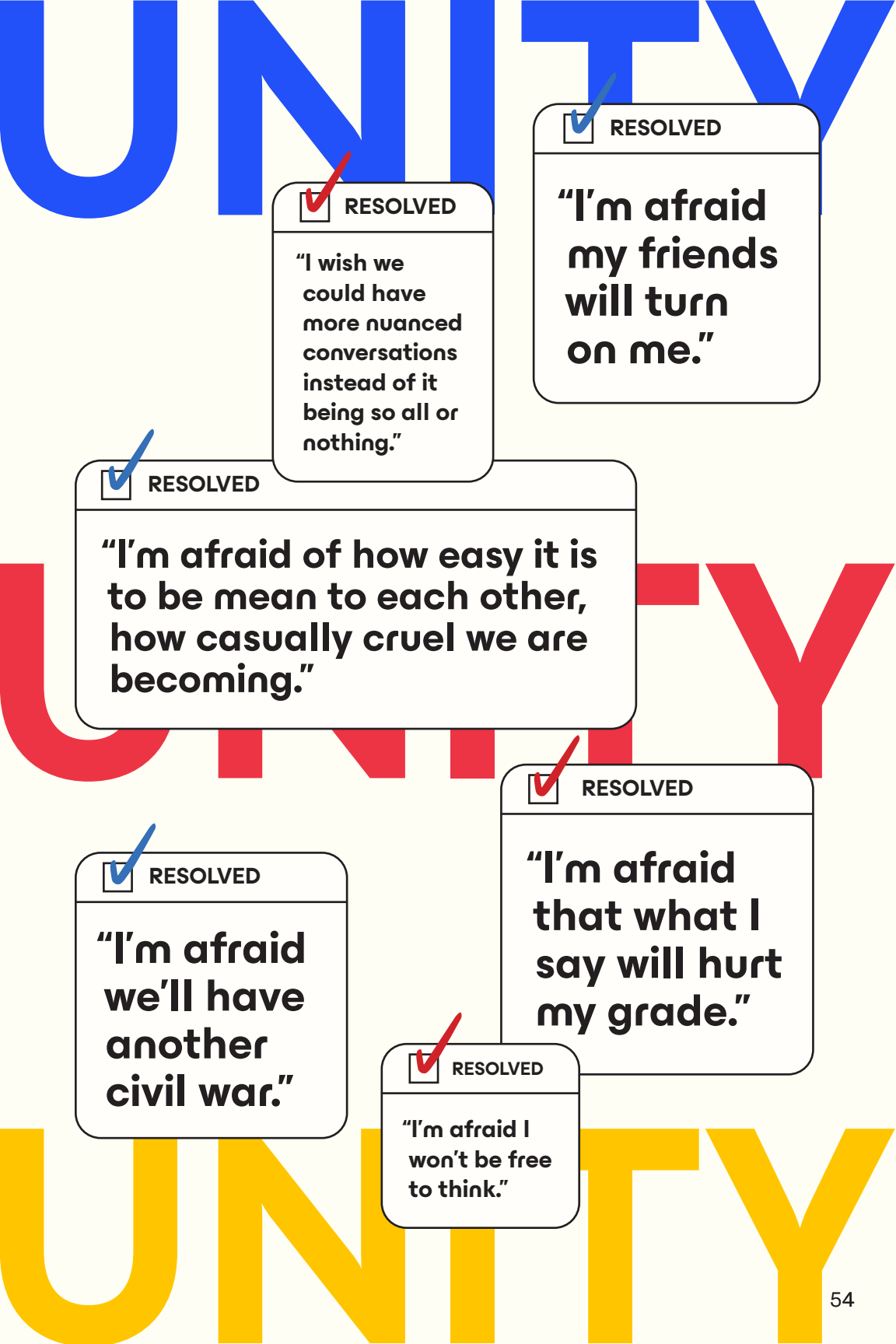
**UNITY WARRIOR**

Just get people in a room (or a Zoom) to start talking. If you're in college, talk to the College Democrats and Republicans, and different affinity groups to bring people in. Even better, you can take the lead on launching a new No Labels college chapter at your college. If you aren't in school, reach out to local Rotary clubs, civic groups or nonprofit organizations. Once you get connected to No Labels and join our National Citizen Corps, we'll provide you with resources and action items you can use to get people organized and mobilized.

This is the opportunity – and the cause – of a lifetime.



It is time to rediscover the pragmatic roots of American democracy. History is calling all at this moment and we need to listen. Come join us in the home we've built to empower you.



RESOLVED

**"I'm afraid  
my friends  
will turn  
on me."**



RESOLVED

**"I wish we  
could have  
more nuanced  
conversations  
instead of it  
being so all or  
nothing."**



RESOLVED

**"I'm afraid of how easy it is  
to be mean to each other,  
how casually cruel we are  
becoming."**



RESOLVED

**"I'm afraid  
that what I  
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RESOLVED

**"I'm afraid  
we'll have  
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RESOLVED

**"I'm afraid I  
won't be free  
to think."**



**JOIN US  
TO BE A  
UNITY  
WARRIOR**



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