Can Decorum and Civility Be Restored on Capitol Hill? We Ask the Experts

November 24, 2023 **by Dan McCue**

The US Capitol, the week tempers flared in separate incidents during a Senate hearing and in a basement hallway. (Photo by Dan McCue)

WASHINGTON — The date was Feb. 5, 1858, and as evening arrived in Washington, long-standing hostilities over the issue of slavery were about to boil over in the well of the House of Representatives.

It began when Galusha Grow, a Republican member from Pennsylvania, decided to amble over to the Democratic side of

the chamber.

Grow, in fact, had been a member of the Democratic Conference until he switched his allegiance to the newly formed Republican Party in the mid-1850s after Democrats tried to force the extension of slavery into the western territories.

Still, Grow had a few friends remaining in the conference, so a visit to the other side would not have been unusual.

This time, however, his decision to step over the line in the House chamber deeply offended Rep. Laurence Keitt, a Democrat from South Carolina, who made his displeasure known in no uncertain terms.

“Sit down, you black Republican puppy,” Keitt said.

“No negro-driver shall crack his whip over me,” Grow responded.

With that, an enraged Keitt lunged for Grow’s throat, shouting, “I’ll choke you for that.”

And a brawl ensued, with at least 50 members taking part.

“It was a free-for-all,” Henry Watterson, then a young newspaperman watching from the press gallery, recalled several years later. “[With] a dozen pistols gleaming.”

The only thing that avoided significant bloodshed, said Watterson, who later went on to be the part-owner and editor of the Louisville Courier-Journal, was a moment of unexpected levity.

It occurred, in Watterson’s telling, as Rep. John Potter, of Wisconsin, an ardent supporter of civil rights for African

Americans, took a swing at Rep. William Barksdale, a staunch segregationist from Mississippi.

Potter's blow missed its mark, but still managed to dislodge Barksdale's hairpiece (alternate versions of the story credit the missed blow to Rep. Cadwallader Washburn, also of Wisconsin).

Potter, in Watterson's version, immediately grabbed the wig and gave out a "war-whoop" before shouting, "Hooray boys, I've got his scalp!"

An embarrassed Barksdale grabbed back his wig, but in the midst of the fracas, put it on backwards, causing both sides to erupt into spontaneous laughter.

"Everybody in a flash recognized both the danger and the absurdity to which each had been making himself a party, and joined in a roar of relieving laughter," Watterson said.

"Most of the participants then evaporated into the cloak rooms for fluid refreshment," he added.

Different Era, but Passions Still Come to a Boil

Those with a long view of history likely couldn't help but take note of this and other notorious incidents in congressional history after a fistfight nearly broke out in a Senate hearing and a Republican congressman accused former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., of assaulting him just ahead of the Thanksgiving break.

It was during a Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing a week ago Tuesday, that an argument almost turned into a fistfight between Republican Sen. Markwayne Mullin of Oklahoma, a former MMA fighter, and the president of the Teamsters Union, Sean O'Brien.

The dispute between the two dated back to a heated back-and-forth at a previous congressional hearing. In its wake, Mullin and O'Brien continued to exchange barbs on social media, and they even discussed competing in an MMA fight for charity.

The one thing that was beyond dispute was that by Nov. 14, O'Brien had clearly gotten under Mullin's skin.

When it came time for Mullin to question the Teamster chief, he instead chose to read a tweet O'Brien posted to Twitter, now X, early last summer.

Sen. Markwayne Mullin, R-Okla., attends NCAA Wrestling Championships, March 18, 2023, in Tulsa, Okla. (AP Photo/Sue Ogrocki, File)

"Greedy CEO who pretends like he's self made. In reality, just a clown & fraud. Always has been, always will be. Quit the tough guy act in these Senate hearings. You know where to find me. Anyplace, Anytime cowboy," the post said.

The post was hashtagged "#LittleManSyndrome" and included a photo of Mullin at a campaign debate in which he was standing on a pedestal behind a podium.

"Sir, this is a time; this is a place. You want to run your mouth? We can be two consenting adults. We can finish it here," Mullin growled as he came to the last words of the post.

"OK, that's fine, perfect," O'Brien said.

"You want to do it now?" Mullin replied.

"I'd love to do it right now," O'Brien said.

"Then stand your butt up then," Mullin said.

"You stand your butt up," O'Brien said.

As Mullin stood to accept O'Brien's challenge, Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., the committee's chairman, intervened.

"Stop it! No, sit down!" he yelled at Mullin.

"You are a United States senator," he reminded his colleague.

Mullin and O'Brien continued to call each other names for a time, but order, of a kind, was restored.

Meanwhile — with Tuesday on the verge of becoming the kind of day that inspires editors to ask reporters, "You kissed the sky today, didn't you?" — Rep. Tim Burchett, R-Tenn., who voted to oust McCarthy as House speaker last month, accused McCarthy of elbowing him in the kidneys as the ex-speaker passed him in a Capitol hallway.

At the time Burchett was speaking to NPR congressional correspondent Claudia Grisales, and she would later write a lengthy account of the blow — and the subsequent confrontation between the two men — on her X account.

"Have NEVER seen this on Capitol Hill," she began. "While talking to Rep. Burchett after the GOP conference meeting,

former speaker McCarthy walked by with his detail and … shoved Burchett. Burchett lunged towards me. I thought it was a joke, it was not. And a chase ensued."

Burchett did indeed chase after McCarthy to confront him but when he got to him, the former speaker claimed he didn't know what Burchett was talking about and that any contact that might have been made was unintentional.

"You got no guts, Kevin," Burchett said. "What kind of chicken move is that? You're pathetic, man. You are so pathetic."

McCarthy later denied that he struck Burchett, telling reporters, "If I'd kidney-punched him, he'd be on the ground."

"What are we, in high school?" Burchett said when told of McCarthy's comments.

Burchett also said he had no intention of speaking further with McCarthy about the incident.

"He's on a downhill spiral. That was pretty gutless of him. I'm disappointed in him, frankly," Burchett said.

Though Burchett declined to press charges against McCarthy, Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., who spearheaded the push to oust the former speaker, filed a complaint to the House Ethics Committee about the incident.

Concern Over Tensions Dates Back to the Founding

When the first Congress convened in Federal Hall, a building at the corner of Wall and Nassau Streets in New York City in the spring of 1789, decorum and the etiquette practiced by its members was very much on the minds of those forming the brand new federal government.

Shortly after arriving in New York, the new body created a committee chaired by former patriot and future president James Madison to prepare a report on rules and other matters related to proceedings so that the business of the chamber could be "properly" carried out.

Among the committee's earliest recommendations, for instance, was that no one be permitted to talk, read or move about while another member was addressing the House.

The committee then moved on to discussing the duties of the sergeant-at-arms, and what he should do when the anticipated physical and verbal brawls broke out in the chamber.

It was based on the committee's recommendation that the first House speaker, Frederick Muhlenberg of Pennsylvania, authorized a mace to be brought into the chamber so the sergeant-at-arms could brandish it to quell disruptive behavior by members.

The work of the committee continued unabated until the Senate finally had a quorum, and the Congress, as a whole, carried out the process of electing the first president and vice president of the United States.

Once the votes were tallied, messengers were sent to Massachusetts and Virginia to report the outcome to John Adams and George Washington, who only then began to make their way to New York.

While Congress awaited their arrival, Madison's committee resumed its housekeeping chores, determining, among other things, rules for decorum and debate.

"They really worried about rowdyism, which says something about what usually went on in state legislatures," wrote Robert

V. Remini in his "The House: The History of the House of Representatives."

Sadly, Madison and his colleagues were prescient when it came to the breakdown of polite discourse in the halls of Congress and the political sphere more broadly.

History is rife with incidents of real violence in the House chamber, none perhaps more famous than the attack upon Republican Sen. Charles Sumner, of Massachusetts, by Rep. Preston Brooks of South Carolina.

On May 20, 1856, Sumner had made a fiery speech denouncing the Kansas-Nebraska Act and arguing for the immediate admission of Kansas as a free state.

The speech also took highly personal swipes at the act's co-author's Sens. Stephen Douglas of Illinois and Andrew Butler of South Carolina.

So provocative were Sumner's remarks that Douglas is said to have turned to a colleague and said, "this damn fool [Sumner] is going to get himself shot by some other damn fool."

Brooks couldn't find it in himself to be so detached — Butler was his first cousin once removed. The entire family's reputation was at stake.

His first thought was to challenge Sumner to a duel, and he went so far as to consult fellow South Carolina Rep. Laurence Keitt (whose name you may remember from above) on dueling etiquette.

Keitt dissuaded Brooks from proposing a duel after explaining that dueling was for gentlemen of equal social standing, and in his view, Sumner was no gentleman.

On May 22, two days after Sumner's speech, Brooks entered the Senate chamber along with Keitt.

Arriving at Sumner's desk, he found the senator engrossed in writing letters to constituents.

"Mr. Sumner, I have read your speech twice over carefully. It is a libel on South Carolina, and Mr. Butler, who is a relative of mine," he said.

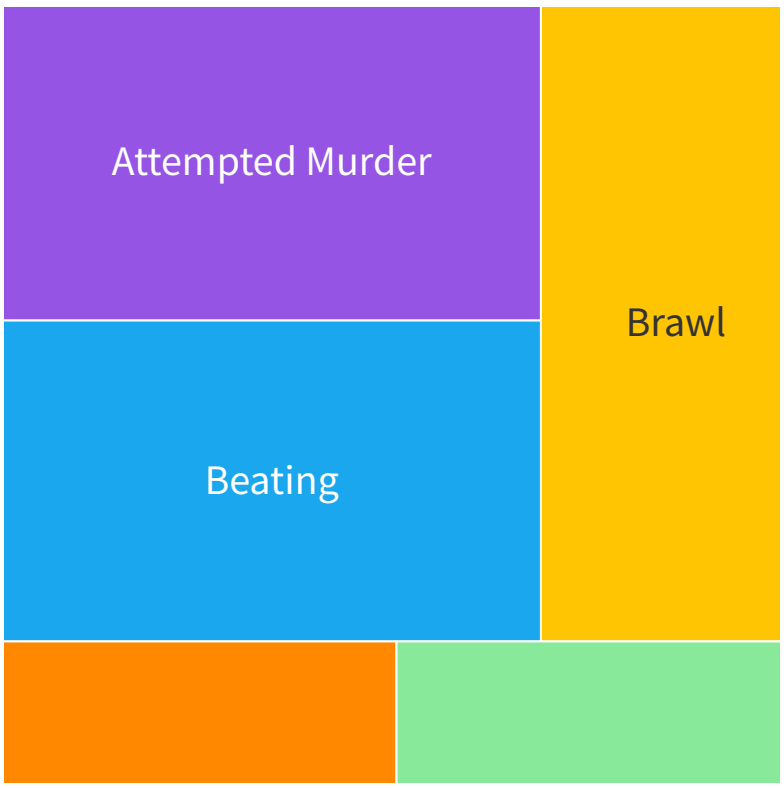
Sumner began to stand up, but Brooks hit Sumner several times over the head with his cane.

Sumner tried to seek protection under his heavy wooden desk, but instead found himself trapped as the desk was bolted to the floor.

As Brooks swung on, Sen. John Crittenden, Rep. Ambrose Murray and others attempted to intervene, certain that Sumner was about to be killed.

However, they were blocked by Keitt, who brandished a pistol and shouted at onlookers to leave Brooks and Sumner alone.

Sumner eventually broke the desk away from the floor and tried to make an escape, but by then he was unable to do much more than stagger up the aisle and collapse unconscious.



Source: The Well News, Wikipedia

A Flourish hierarchy chart

How to Get There From Here

This history and its modern manifestation beg any number of questions: Is it even possible to achieve the goals of decorum that Madison and his brethren were after? What factors have led to

the current age of divisiveness? And what can one do when decorum and any real sense of the social graces have been heaved out the window?

To get answers, The Well News turned to etiquette and decorum experts from across the country.

Closest to home, were Pamela Eyring, president of The Protocol School of Washington, and Lynn Williams, the client-relations specialist with the school.

For those unfamiliar with the school, Eyring explained that it has been promoting civility, professionalism, communications skills and business etiquette for 34 years. In that time, it has trained more than 5,000 professionals from over 80 countries.

As our conversation began, Eyring joked that trying to bring civility back to Capitol Hill is "kind of like rearranging the chairs on the Titanic."

But the conversation quickly turned more serious.

"I think the first thing that has to happen … is that as a body, the House and Senate first have to realize they have a real problem," Williams said.

"I'm not sure how that comes to pass — maybe the people who elect them should help them to understand they have a problem — but when you have someone actually suggesting fighting a man in the Senate … I mean, we really have gotten to the bottom," she said.

How we got there is open to interpretation.

"I think part of what we're seeing in terms of incivility on Capitol Hill is a reflection of the greater society, and the influence of modern or mass media, and then social media, the latter

particularly being a venue where we can say whatever we want, whenever we want and however we want, without consideration of respect for other people," Eyring said.

Eyring and Williams also suggest that at least some of the lack of decorum in evidence today on Capitol Hill is a byproduct of a decadeslong loosening of mores in the business world.

Williams, for instance, recalled her own experience as a corporate officer with the SCANA Corp., an electric and gas utility based in Cayce, South Carolina.

"I think it was probably about 25 years ago," she recalled. "It was a very hot summer, I admit that, and in response, our president decided that we should start having a casual Friday.

"Well, it wasn't long before casual Friday became casual Monday through Friday and, pretty soon, the jackets were gone. The ties were gone. And I just couldn't do it," she said. "Now, of course, the people who did embrace the new casual dress code still had to dress up — or dress accordingly – when an important client or someone was coming in.

"But I remember thinking as this was happening — not just in our offices but across America — that people had simply decided, 'Let's just forget everything we were taught to believe about how you ought to dress' and it became this casual attitude.

"And I think — not always, but a lot of the time — how you dress affects how you behave on the job," Williams said.

Eyring cited the more recent example of the impact of Zoom and other video calls during the coronavirus pandemic.

"We got so relaxed behind the screen," she said. "I mean, we're sitting here right now doing a Zoom call, and you can see my top,

and my necklace, but you have no idea whether I'm wearing any shoes right now, right? I could be wearing flip-flops. Or shorts. Or, for that matter, I can be in a bathing suit," she said.

Pamela Eyring, president, The Protocol School of Washington.

"I mean, that was the byproduct of those calls. Here we were, confined in our homes, and people thought, 'Oh well, I can dress casually in this situation. 'I don't need to put on the power suit. It won't matter.' But you know, it really did," Eyring said.

"We do a lot of training virtually, and when I do those calls, despite their virtual nature, I still dress up," she said. "For one thing, it's respectful to me. I feel stronger and more powerful.

I'm also mindful that I am representing my school. At the same time, however, I'm also showing respect to their organization.

"The power of how one dresses is like a hidden secret today, where it used to be the norm," she said.

At this point, the conversation turned to air travel. Time was, everyone dressed up to catch a flight. Today, sweatpants and pajamas are considered "dressing practically."

"You think of the days when people would take a Pan Am flight somewhere and be all dressed up, and it somehow heightened the experience," Eyring said. "Now, you're almost scared to get on a plane because you don't know who's going to throw something at someone, or trip somebody in the aisle, or get mad and become hostile because you pushed their seat.

"I see the same thing happening in the House. As the social norms have declined, so too has the quality of the experience, or in this case, the ability of our representatives to acknowledge that if we didn't have a diversity of ideas and thoughts and experiences, we wouldn't have such a great country," she continued.

"A personal pet peeve of mine is the sarcasm and the name calling," Eyring said. "When you get into a situation where that's the norm, not only does it undermine civil discourse, it makes it all that much harder to find common ground and make those decisions that need to be made.

"It heightens partisanship, polarizes the political factions, damages reputations and just sets a negative example," she added.

"I think it starts from the top," said Patricia Napier-Fitzpatrick, founder and president of The Etiquette School of New York.

"In the corporate world that would mean, with the CEO, but it could be the principal of a school, or the mother and father in a family," she said. "And in Congress, it would be the speaker of the House who you'd expect to try to inspire people to be their best selves and respectful of each other."

Napier-Fitzpatrick, a former marketing executive at Estee Lauder and Bergdorf Goodman, founded the school 20 years ago to offer a comprehensive program of business and social etiquette training and international protocol seminars.

She said a rebirth of interest in etiquette since the 1990s has enabled her to expand her business, which now offers classes both in Manhattan and Southampton, on the east end of Long Island. She's also written five books about etiquette and is now working on her sixth.

"I mean, without trying to be partisan, do you remember when House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., ripped up the president's speech as he concluded his State of the Union address?" Napier-Fitzpatrick said, recalling the headline-making event at then-President Donald Trump's 2020 address to a joint session of Congress.

That evening started awkwardly enough, with Pelosi extending her hand to the president as he reached the podium, only to have him turn away without accepting it.

It ended, 78 minutes later, with Pelosi standing and tearing up her copy of his remarks, which she later called a "manifesto of mistruths."

"Now, regardless of your politics, was that setting a good example?" Napier-Fitzpatrick asked. "You have to say no. What it really did was say, 'You don't have to be nice. If we don't like

someone, we can even tear up their speech on national television.'

"I remember when I was young and starting out in New York, one of my bosses said, 'There are going to be times when we'll have to agree to disagree, but let's be civil about it.' That's what was missing from that moment," she said.

"The reason we have rules of etiquette is to provide us with guidelines to make us better people, so to speak," she said. "Without them, we wouldn't always be our better selves."

Lynn Williams, client-relations specialist, The Protocol School of Washington.

Napier-Fitzpatrick went on to suggest that social media has been a compounding factor when these instances occur.

"I don't want to blame social media, but I guess I will join the crowd that says the advent of social media seems to have been the start of when things got a lot worse in Congress," she said. "Suddenly, you had members of Congress and the Senate who

were more concerned with how they promoted their image on these platforms than anything else.

"It was suddenly all about me, me, me versus us, us, us and working together to make our country the best it could be."

A number of experts in decorum also suggested the media is heavily to blame for the decline in manners, rewarding bad behavior with more and more air time.

Among them was Lydia Ramsey, of Savannah, Georgia, the author of "Manners That Sell — Adding the Polish That Builds Profits" and "Lydia Ramsey's Little Book of Table Manners."

Through her boutique practice, Ramsey has worked as a consultant for a number of commercial entities, including Gulfstream Aerospace, the Georgia Ports Authority, SunTrust Bank, The PGA Tour, the American Hospital Association, and the U.S. Federal District and Bankruptcy courts.

In addition to all this, she's also a former member of the media, having been a columnist for the Savannah Morning News.

"I do think the media bears a big responsibility for the rude behavior we are seeing in our Congress and in our society," she said. "We all know that bad news sells and good news does not. As a result the media will jump on any unpleasantness or bad behavior. And they will repeat it over and over again until they are sure everyone has seen or heard of the obnoxious behavior.

"The public cannot hide from the news," Ramsey continued. "And I think media coverage of the politicians' actions has had a direct, negative effect on decorum in society in general.

"People have always been drawn to a fight or a horrific event. I can't help but think of people who got some sort of pleasure from

watching public hangings and executions, and now they're tuning in to watch the public altercations in Congress," she said.

"And what happens is the publication of these events, in print and through broadcasts, confirms to them that they can imitate this behavior.

"Frankly, I have been shocked by what I have been seeing in the behavior of our elected officials," Ramsey said.

"My mantra has always been that etiquette is not about being stuffy or aloof; it's about kindness, courtesy and respect. Sadly, kindness, courtesy and respect don't sell," she added.

There Are Appropriate Role Models, We Just Need More of Them

"Sadly, the Trump years have taken their toll on behavior in general," Didi Lorillard said in an email to The Well News as she prepared to travel for the Thanksgiving holiday.

"We look for role models to learn how to behave and follow them, and Mr. Trump has become a model of his own [brand of] decorum," she said.

"Protocol, etiquette and manners are all about consideration," Lorillard continued. "There is nothing considerate about the Jan. 6 siege on the U.S. Capitol. No respect and no consideration.

"Acts of violence aren't considerate," she added.

Born and Bred in Newport, Rhode Island, Lorillard worked for a number of years for The New Republic, Saturday Review and Mother Jones, while also publishing "New York, New York: A Counter Chic Guide to Manhattan" and "Buy the Best."

She and her husband, the historian Robert Cowley, live in Newport, and when she told her friend and literary agent

Esmond

Didi Lorillard, founder of Newport Manners.

Harmsworth that she was writing a book called "Newport Etiquette & Manners," he suggested that she start a website to find out what people really wanted to know about the subject.

She launched NewportManners.com in 2002.

Encouraged to expand on her assessment of the state of decorum on Capitol Hill, Lorillard said, "We've gone the way of the Russian thug culture.

"Now, can we say Congress as a whole is a bunch of thugs? No, because we still have brilliant, dedicated career politicians," she said.

With that, she offered a short list that included Sens. Sheldon Whitehouse and Jack Reed, both Democrats from Rhode Island, former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., former Rhode Island Gov. Gina Raimondo, who is currently serving as President Biden's secretary of Commerce, Rep. Gabe Amo, D-R.I., Sens.

Mitt Romney, R-Utah, and Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., former President Barack Obama, former Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo., and two late senators, John McCain, R-Ariz., and Bob Dole, R-Kan.

"There are others," she said, "But what distinguishes all of them is that it feels as though they were born and bred to serve.

"If we want to start improving the behavior of Congress, we need to start electing more good role models," she added.

So, There's a Problem. How Do We Fix It?

If a problem starts at the top, it's predictable that the solution has to start there too. At least that was the consensus of the etiquette and decorum experts consulted for this piece.

At the same time, all agreed that individual members of Congress could start the ball rolling by being mindful of the sense of decorum they set for their own offices.

"The boss who lacks manners and decorum not only sets a bad example, but he also signals to his staff members that it is acceptable to act that way," said Ramsey.

"In addition, the boss who is rude and discourteous to employees has a negative effect on staff morale and is likely to face constant turnover in the office," she said, adding, "a lack of manners when dealing with the staff of colleagues will immediately decrease your effectiveness and ability to work with others."

Asked if there's some set of rules of etiquette and decorum that any government or elected official should follow, Ramsey offered the following short list:

- Show respect for others.
- Listen to people with whom you disagree.
- Don't interrupt people who are talking to you.

- Don't yell or raise your voice to make a point.
- Pay attention to your attire by dressing appropriately.

"Members of Congress set an example for members of society. We are taken more seriously when we honor others by our attire and our behavior," she said.

Ramsey's other recommendations were that officials:

- Address people with respect by using their correct titles and names.
- Honor other people's time by being punctual.

"Arriving late is not a badge of honor," she said.

But even in offering these suggestions, Ramsey added a caution: "Etiquette is not about the rules; it's about the relationships," she said.

"The rules need not be presented as stiff and formal or as outdated. Like everything in life, etiquette has evolved over time. Men don't wear hats on the street anymore and ladies don't wear white gloves every day, but etiquette still applies to our daily life," Ramsey said.

But what, we wondered, if the House speaker or a business leader makes restoring decorum a priority, but still finds one or two of their colleagues or staffers resistant to the call?

"That's a difficult one," Ramsey admitted. "It takes courage to confront an individual about their behavior and suggest a class on etiquette. That, however, is the job of a leader.

"Often the leader wants to set up a class or workshop to dodge the issue or the person. By doing that they skirt the issue and the offender sits there saying, 'Not me. I never behave like that.' The lesson falls on deaf ears," she said.

Diane Gottsman, founder and owner of **The Protocol School of Texas**, is, like her

Patricia Napier-Fitzpatrick, founder and president of The Etiquette School of New York.

counterparts quoted in this piece, a 20-plus-year veteran of the etiquette and decorum space, and the author of multiple books on etiquette in a variety of settings and situations.

As noted on her website, the San Antonio, Texas-based consultant holds a master's degree in Human Behavior and has spent the last two decades teaching business professionals, university students and individuals on how to navigate social and professional situations.

Like Ramsey, she stressed that "decorum" is really another word for building relationships.

"Building trust takes time, effort, sometimes contrition, and then more time and effort," she said. "It's not a one-time purchase, it's an ongoing quest to do good, be good, and influence and impact as a leader.

"The bottom line is, whether you are an elected official or a barista in a coffee shop, people align with people they can trust," Gottsman said.

Her own list of attributes that lend themselves to better decorum included: cooperation, compassion, authenticity, intentional effort to work towards the good of another person, ability to show empathy for another person, gratitude, understanding and respect.

As far as dealing with a straggler who might not be getting the message is concerned, Gottsman said, "thinking of others and the influence we have is an effective leadership skill."

"What a leader really has to say in this situation is some form of 'Get it together.' If you have somebody that needs help — whether it's medically, socially, physically — you should encourage them to put in the work and that includes holding themselves accountable across the board, at home, at the grocery store, in private and in public."

Gottsman added, "Everyone makes mistakes and at one time or another, it's called being human. When there is a lack of humanity, compassion, conviction, humility or a feeling of being untouchable, then there's a problem!"

Lorillard suggested that such situations be handled as an "HR problem."

"And there are a number of approaches you can take to this: for instance, etiquette and protocol classes could be offered and

certain people could be recommended to attend those classes. On the other hand, a merit system could work; so many demerits and you're not allowed in chambers. Of course, then you're getting into changing rules, and you would have to be a majority to push it through both Houses.

"One thing I would definitely recommend is that all members of Congress be given a copy of George Washington's 'Rules of Civility & Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation,'" Lorillard said.

"There are110 Rules, starting with #1: 'Every action done in company ought to be with some sign of respect to those that are present,' and ends with #110: 'Labour to keep alive your heart in your breast that little celestial fire called conscience.'

"George Washington must have had to deal with some real tough guys and this little book is his legacy," Lorillard continued. "The Rules of Congress were written by George Washington and they are all there … and need to be followed. Then they have to be made accountable for their bad behavior."

She added that her personal favorites among Washington's rules are:

#42: "Let thy ceremonies in courtesy be proper to the dignity of his place with whom thou converses, for it is absurd to act the same with a clown and a prince."

#49: "Use no reproachful language against another or any one; neither curse nor revile."

#58: "Let your conversation be without malice or envy, for it is a sign of a tractable and commendable nature; and in all cases of passion admit reason to govern."

One thing Washington understood innately, Lorillard said, was that those who govern are role models.

> "If the people who work with them or for them see and hear lies and witness deceit, they'll think, 'If they can get away with acting that way, then I can too.'
>
> Diane Gottsman, founder and owner of The Protocol School of Texas.

Loyalty, as you know, is also incredibly important to your constituents," she said.

But it's one thing to have rules of etiquette in place, it's another to keep them operable in practice. One way to do so is "to praise the people who work with you and for you. Show appreciation over and over again," Lorillard said.

"How did George Washington make Congress accountable to his 110 'Rules of Civility'? He gave out a lot of medals in appreciation for loyalty to them," she said.

Napier-Fitzpatrick also believes that a real return of decorum in Washington is going to depend on leaders rallying others to the cause.

"I mean, you'll probably laugh at this, but look at Taylor Swift. She's tremendously influential on young girls right now, and because she's a nice young woman herself, the young girls who make up the core of her fans want to be nice young women too," she said.

"So that's kind of the role the new speaker, Mike Johnson, R-La., has to fill now. Whether people agree with his politics or not, he's got to gather them together and lead them in the direction of a renewed civility; in a sense, to cite another example, it's like Steve Jobs was for Apple. He'd get up there and assume the mantle of inspirational leader — you inspire people by having a better path forward.

"Now, the one thing we all have to understand is that these are fully formed adults. They've already been formed in terms of their personalities. So it's going to be hard to go back. … Unless we have the right leaders guiding people.

"I mean, I think we've come a long way from the days when people were brandishing guns in the House chamber, but here's the thing: These are all human beings we're talking about," Napier-Fitzpatrick said.

"I'm sure if Kevin McCarthy did jab Rep. Burchett with his elbow that he regrets it — especially now that people know about it," she continued. "But it's hard, even if you're an ethical, polite person, to get a situation right all of the time. Sometimes you lose your temper, you know? And in that case, what do you do? You apologize.

"That's how you restore your own equilibrium and sense of decorum. You apologize and you say, 'You know what, I was wrong.' That's what you teach children on the playground. Do we really have to teach adults this? Well, you know, I guess we do.

"Have you ever watched 'Ted Lasso?' Well, I think what we need are more Ted Lassos. Let's create a real figure and send them directly to Congress. We need someone like that, someone who can give pep talks one minute and at other times, tell them in a more serious vein, 'We've got to be good today. We're here to help our country.'"

Eyring said one idea that needs to be reinforced if civility is to return to Capitol Hill is that "we're not in the caveman era anymore, where he who is mightiest and beats his chest the hardest is the ruler."

"I mean, one thing I've seen in our politics is that everybody wants to be the show pony … they all want to, to use a military term, use shock and awe to tantalize the media and get more attention for themselves. This is nothing new, celebrities do it all the time," she said.

"Now, there are some who I would say still have a sense of decorum and want to be looked at in a different way, but the individuals who make up the shock and awe crowd, just want to keep stoking the fire and fueling the anger out there," Eyring said.

"I just don't think that says much for their emotional intelligence or their ability to understand that by doing these things, they are creating the disrespect, the lack of decorum, that demeans the entire government in the eyes of the public.

"And I don't see what that gains them. It gets them attention, yes. And the media eats it up, because it loves dirty laundry. But in a sense, it's like when you're dealing with a child having a