

Examples of Consensus on Public Policy

One widely publicized example of hostile camps reaching agreements on public policy occurred in June 1997, when representatives for attorneys general from 40 states, the tobacco companies, and major anti-smoking groups unanimously agreed on a measure to curb teenage smoking and resolve the states' lawsuits against the companies.

Other such examples have received less attention. In 1998, for instance, twenty-four representatives from across the political spectrum — assembled by the Center for Strategic and International Studies — developed a comprehensive plan for saving Social Security from insolvency yet insuring that the vast majority of Americans could retire with some financial security.¹

The following year, eighteen representatives from the Cato Institute, the Progressive Policy Institute, and other ideologically driven organizations — most on the right, but some clearly from the left and the center — unanimously agreed on a plan for restraining health care costs while boosting quality.²

And in 2004, sixteen politically diverse advocates, called the National Commission on Energy Policy, devised a plan for reducing the nation's consumption of foreign oil at minimal cost.³

Congress has in fact authorized a process known as “negotiated rulemaking,” under which opposing camps can craft certain federal regulations. Using that process, long time opponents have unanimously agreed on regulations covering food safety, student loans and disposal of nuclear waste.⁴

More recently, in 2010, representatives for auto makers, labor unions, environmental groups, various state agencies and federal regulators negotiated new fuel economy standards for cars and trucks, standards significantly tighter than most commentators had thought possible. Yet, all sides hailed that agreement.⁵

¹ *The 21st Century Retirement Security Plan: The National Commission on Retirement Policy Final Report*, Washington: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1999

² *A Vision for Consumer-Driven Health Care Reform*, The Consensus Group, 1999, galen.org/fileuploads/vision.pdf

³ *Ending the Energy Stalemate: A Bipartisan Strategy to Meet America's Energy Challenges* (www.energycommission.org)

⁴ <http://archive.org/details/gov.acus.1995.source>

⁵ “Toward a 21st-Century Regulatory System,” *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 21. 2011