

Dear Senior Fellows and Friends,

On September 21<sup>st</sup>, twenty-six people created a space for civil dialogue with Norman B. Cummings, a very accomplished Republican political strategist. Accompanying Norm was Grace Cummings, his wife and a former guest speaker. Those of you who attended Grace's 2008 session with Dick McCaffery will remember that she spent years working on Capitol Hill and now consults and teaches federal leadership cohorts how to work with Congress, at the Federal Executive Institute and elsewhere. Several times during the evening, Norm handed off to Grace to explain something that he thought she knew more about.

Here are a few quotes that provide a hint of the discussion's flavor:

"I'm not the issue; my candidate is." --Norm, explaining why we wouldn't find very much about him on the Web!

"I'm a political professional - not an implementer; a table-setter." --Norm, explaining that what he does comes before what we do in the political continuum, which he views as circular, not linear.

"Policy and politics are joined at the hip all of the time." --Grace, explaining that policy can't be made in a vacuum.

"How do you deliver a message? It's a big question right now." --Norm, explaining that blogs have changed things (with TV, you have the FCC. With the mail, you have postal inspectors).

"Most people don't stay long enough to fail. You need to know how to deal with failure. And by the way, both parties are terrible at success." --Norm, explaining that the group of people who do his job is very small.

Workplaces represented that night included the following:

American University/Serial Entrepreneur  
ARES Corporation  
Army Corps of Engineering  
Advanced Research Program Analysis Consultant  
Defense Information Systems Agency  
Department of Education  
Department of Homeland Security  
Environmental Protection Agency  
Government Accountability Office  
Library of Congress  
National Institutes of Health  
National Science Foundation  
Naval Postgraduate School

Patent and Trademark Office  
Senior Executives Association  
Storyteller  
Temple University (Journalist)  
The Cummings Group  
The Educe Group  
Working with Congress

In reflecting on this event, what I found most impressive was the courtesy, thought, and self-discipline that was evident in the room. This was in direct contrast to the heated debate and namecalling over health care that had been occurring nationally the week before, and several of us went into the session wondering if it would be equally contentious. While public debate promotes healthy government, Senior Fellows and Friends fosters attentive interaction that helps everyone learn together, whether executive or intern. If we do nothing else but respect and really hear each other, that in itself will increase the capacity of government.

In closing, to those of you who came, kudos. To all others, best wishes! Please consider joining us in the future.

Sincerely,

Kitty Wooley  
U.S. Department of Education