



TENNESSEE BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE

TBR CO-HOSTS FORUM ON CIVILITY IN POLITICS

The Tennessee Business Roundtable, Gov. Phil Bredesen and First Lady Andrea Conte, the University of Tennessee's Baker Center for Public Policy, Belmont University and the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center hosted a forum on civil discourse in American politics as a prelude to the 2008 Town Hall Presidential Debate.

Former CNN anchor Bernard Shaw moderated the one-hour event assessing this year's presidential race, and pose the key question: "Is Uncivil Discourse Sabotaging American Politics and Governance?" The event, featured a panel discussion with nationally known media and political experts, was held Monday, Oct. 6th at Belmont's Troutt Theater on the Belmont University campus in Nashville.

The panelists included in the forum were Mississippi Gov. Haley Barbour, a former chairman of the Republican National Committee; Politico managing editor Bill Nichols, a veteran journalist who has covered six presidential elections; former Democratic Congresswoman Pat Schroeder, now president and CEO of the Association of American Publishers; and Mark Whitaker, senior vice president and Washington bureau chief for NBC News.

Through a partnership between the Tennessee Business Roundtable and the Howard Baker Center in Knoxville, a Civility in Government task force has been established that has focused on the importance of civil discourse and how it can positively affect our government and elections. President of the Roundtable, William (Tinker) Kelly stated, "There is not a more important issue on the table today. Washington style politics has proven to be unproductive and we should continue to encourage our leaders to make the critical changes for the good of our nation."

"We're in the homestretch of one of the fiercest and hardest-fought presidential elections in American history," Bredesen said. "On the eve of Belmont's Town Hall Presidential Debate, it's appropriate to hit the pause button to examine the tone and tenor of these campaigns, and hopefully set the tone for a civil conclusion."

The task force distributed a "Civility in Government – Principles and Exemplars" booklet at the conclusion of the event that focuses on the principles of political civility followed by examples of civility in action. The task force noted that one obstacle in creating a more civil atmosphere was the lack of understanding what civility means, of where debate ends and incivility begins (enclosed).

Baker added: "Without civility, without a decent respect for different points of view, our style of government simply will not function. I am proud that the Baker Center is a partner in this important effort to discuss and promote civility."

This was the second event that has focused on Civility. The Roundtable, the Baker Center and the Freedom Forum hosted the first forum last January. Panelists included Gov. Phil Bredesen, Senator Bob Dole, Senator Tom Daschle, and was moderated by John Seigenthaler, founder of the First Amendment Center. There will be upcoming events sponsored by TBR on this important issue.