

# Politicians Are People Too (Why we should welcome the #bipartisanroadtrip)

Other than the BBC Dad story (which makes me laugh to the point of tears pretty much every time I watch it), my favorite story of the week is of the #bipartisanroadtrip – a two-day drive undertaken by Texas Congressmen Will Hurd (a Republican) and Beto O'Rourke (a Democrat). The two men, who don't seem to have had much of a relationship before the trip, decided to team up to get to Washington in time for some votes after their flights were canceled due to our winter storm.

During the trip, the congressmen talked policy, fielded some calls, uploaded videos to Facebook (of course) – and generally just got to know one another. And... whaddya know? It turns out that they kind of like each other. These two politicians from opposite sides of the aisle found some common ground; they built up some good will.

Moreover, because Hurd and O'Rourke broadcast their trip on social media, they were able to bring other Americans along with them on their journey. Not just their literal journey, their tens of hours together in a car – their journey toward a friendly, productive working relationship.

Man, do we need these kinds of stories right now, or what?

I'm a dreamer and an idealist, so it's easy for me to get wrapped up in this sort of thing. Indeed, during the election I nursed this fantasy of a Congressional exchange program, wherein Congressmen from opposing parties would be paired with colleagues whose districts are dramatically different from their own. I love the idea of an urban Congressman sitting down to a backyard barbecue on some ranch in Montana, a western Congressman attending a church service in inner-city Baltimore, a wealthy suburbanite Congressman visiting a VFW in the rust belt, etc. (Let's call this idea #347 for me to fund and promote when I win the lottery.)

But I can be practical too, and I know that with the way politics works these days, any politician who tries to reach out to the other side risks being swatted down by his own. These are divided, partisan times. And politicians can be victims of that paradigm just as they are perpetrators of it.

What a terrible shame that is.

When I was a kid, my Granddad was a local elected official. He served for something

like 15 years, a Republican in a Democrat's state, and get this - he made lots of friends on both sides of the aisle. I don't mean the kind of "friends" who pay for influence. I mean that Granddad - a good, kind man who loves people - became known as a good, kind politician who loved people. And so people (including politicians) loved him.

Years later, when I was lobbying the state legislature, I encountered many of the same politicians who had interacted with my Granddad when he was in office. Each time, the discovery of their relationship was such a gift to me. I cannot begin to tell you the number of times I had someone tell me, "I just love your grandfather. I didn't always agree with him, but I loved working with him and I really respect him." Their respect for Granddad had nothing to do with his (sometimes stubborn!) policy positions; it had everything to do with how he treated other people.

During the 2016 primary campaign, I could see how pained Granddad was at the tone of the thing. "I wish someone would tell people that politicians aren't all bad," he sighed. I agreed, but the wish just seemed futile.

Which brings me back to the #bipartisanroadtrip. This story may seem a little too silly or idealistic or naïve; it may remain in the news cycle for approximately fifteen more minutes. It may cost Congressmen Hurd and O'Rourke, politically. But I'm so glad they undertook it.

We voters need to see politicians as human, as real people with friends and family, eclectic tastes in music, maybe a deep love for coffee. But more than that: We voters need to give politicians the space to see each other as human. We need to support them in their efforts to get to know one another, to consider different perspectives, to talk policy, not shout it. We should allow them to be something as simple as . . . friends.

As far as I'm concerned, a caffeine- and social media- fueled road trip isn't such a bad way to start.



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