

Editorial Page

POLITICAL VOICES

Note from the publisher: Political Voices offers one Republican and one Democrat, chosen by state party leaders, the opportunity to write a column about a preselected topic. This month's topic is political violence.

Political violence isn't symmetrical

It's escalating on the left and must be called out

We keep hearing calls to “encourage thoughtful discourse” and “discourage violent rhetoric.” That’s true, and I have. One political party keeps crossing the line, pretending both parties are equally responsible. In fact, the recent surge in political violence is coming overwhelmingly from the left. If leaders want to promote civility, they need to start with the truth. The truth is that the left has a violence problem.

According to data from the Center for Strategic and International Studies, left-wing terrorist attacks and plots in the U.S. are on the rise. In fact, left-wing incidents reached their highest levels in decades, surpassing those from the far right. (CSIS)

That doesn’t mean violence from the right should be excused. It shouldn’t. But we can’t build “thoughtful discourse” on top of false equivalence.

A quick look at what’s recently been happening:

- In Virginia, a Democrat candidate for Attorney General openly threatened violence against his Republican opponent and his children.
- Sitting members of Congress on the left have flirted with or outright encouraged political violence.
- There have been two attempted assassinations of President Trump, an attempted mass shooting of Republican members of Congress that nearly killed Steve Scalise, the assassination of Charlie Kirk, and even the assassination of a major health-care executive, all tied to left-wing extremists. What’s worse, all of these have been celebrated by many on the left, after the fact.

That’s not just threats or talk.

Here’s how political leaders, particularly Democrats, should respond.

1. Call it out, directly and by name.

When violence or violent rhetoric comes from your own side, say so. Don’t hide behind buzzwords like “both sides” or “extremists everywhere.” That’s political cowardice. Leadership means naming the problem even when it’s uncomfortable.

2. Stop glamorizing outrage.

Too many Democrats treat the loudest, angriest activists as heroes. Social media mobs are rewarded, not rebuked. Political leaders should draw a clear line between passionate advocacy and violent threats, and stop pretending rage is a virtue.

3. Lead with example, not excuses.

You don’t de-escalate violence by winking at it. Too many political leaders, especially on the left, are afraid of offending the radicals in their own ranks. They tiptoe around the problem instead of confronting it. And every time they look the other way, the temperature rises a little higher.

Civility isn’t weakness, it’s strength. We can highlight the differences between candidates, records, and political party platforms, without calling for the utter demise of our opponents. But it only works if both sides play by the same rules.

If Democrats truly want to discourage violence, they need to start by cleaning up their own house. They need to condemn their own radicals as forcefully as they condemn everyone else’s.

Otherwise, all the talk about “thoughtful discourse” is just that, talk.

Because thoughtful discourse doesn’t coexist with threats and intimidation.



By **JEFF KAUFMANN**
Republican Party of Iowa
Chairman

We must cool the rising political violence

Violent rhetoric should not become mainstream

Why can’t we all just get along? This country is subjected to enough political violence every year to make any sane nation reach a breaking point. We can’t stand idly by as killings and terror become normal in America. Each and every one of us should be doing something to bring Americans together as fellow Americans.

It is so easy to become caught up in the us versus them, Republican versus Democrat, left versus right, liberal versus conservative mindset. Advertisements that fill our television screens and mailboxes all claim that candidates and parties are “fighting” for you or “fighting” for certain priorities.

At some point, politics became less about who would be a good candidate to fairly represent the beliefs of their constituents and more about who is the lesser of two evils. The truth is that candidates for public office are rarely evil and nearly always just humans who have been called to public service in a very hostile and divided time in our nation.

No one has all the answers on how we can fix violent rhetoric, but it is obvious to me that each of us must start with our own reactions. We must hold ourselves and our elected officials accountable when it comes to using divisive and violent rhetoric.

That is especially true on social media, where it is so easy to for anyone and everyone to react immediately and often without enough forethought and judgment. It is easy to hide behind a fake or private social media account and say things you wouldn’t normally say if you were speaking to someone person.

Social media has become unbelievably powerful because it works. It impacts others. Words typed out of hate, desperation, or sadness can easily be picked up and shared thousands of times online. Even if an account is private, it’s easy to copy and paste posts until they are shared a million times or more. There’s a reason we say it’s “gone viral”. The question is – is that virus making things better or worse? Is it intended to inform and create positive change or is it designed to incite the hatred and violence that is threatening our very existence as a community, state, country, or nation?

When writing these social media posts, it’s important to remember that we are talking to real people, about other real people and about emotional issues that have real impacts on people’s lives.

I ask myself: “Would you print that thought in your local newspaper with your name next to it? If not, don’t put it online. Share it with your best friend instead.”

In fact, let’s all make an effort to do more by talking to friends, family, and neighbors about the issues that are important to us. One of the reasons divisive online rhetoric has become more acceptable is because we have stopped talking to people who disagree. Let’s all work on our ability to listen and to be curious about someone else’s opinion.

Seek first to understand before seeking to be understood. Never use language that promotes political violence, and tell others that type of language is not acceptable. We can hold elected officials accountable in so many ways that are so much more effective than violent talk or action.

Most elected officials have websites that include their contact information. Call their offices, send them an email, or a handwritten letter that details your concerns. Contact your county political parties, join a protest, or show up to local political events and make your voice heard. Visit iwillvote.com and make a plan to vote on Election Day.

Don’t let yourself fall into that ‘us versus them’ trap, and remember we aren’t at war with ‘the other side.’ We are all trying to make a safer and more prosperous nation for our children and our grandchildren.

The best patriotic and most American way we can build a better country is by negotiating, compromising when it makes sense, and standing up for our values and beliefs through the rights given to us by the Constitution.



By **RITA HART**
Iowa Democratic Party
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**Serving Eastern Jackson
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