

increasing his party's representation in Congress. But though it was his job to strengthen the Democratic Party, Emanuel is cautious about using the word *partisanship*, believing that the media are too quick to chalk up differences to party conflict rather than honest debate and diversity of opinion. It's natural for democracy to be messy and for people to have huge debates about what government should do, but all too often we treat it as pathology rather than a sign of a healthy, functioning democratic system.

“... I DON'T BELIEVE EVERY DISAGREEMENT IS PARTISAN...”

Some Republicans criticized his appointment as Obama's first chief of staff, claiming that he was too partisan and that he didn't signal the kind of transformational politics that Obama had talked about. But Emanuel practices what he preaches about party. He can have strong ideological differences with people, but it isn't personal. He has good friends on both sides of the aisle and is respected by many Republicans as well as Democrats.

Without disagreement, politics can't solve problems. Take the issue of Social Security that Congress dealt with shortly after the 2004 election. Emanuel suggests that when the media label a debate as partisan, they trivialize it. But the debate Congress had about Social Security was not mere partisan bickering—it was essential to policymaking. He says, “We're not having a partisan debate about Social Security. We're having an honest-to-God disagreement. They [Republicans] think Social Security

should go one way, and we [Democrats] think another, and we're not going to get there with everybody sitting around singing ‘Kum Ba Yah.’ An honest fight and debate about that is a good and strong thing. What happens is it gets reported as a partisan fight and just some petty talk. When it's petty and it's partisan, call it. But not every disagreement is partisan.”

An Obama White House with Rahm Emanuel as chief of staff may not have been as peaceful as the No Drama Obama presidential campaign, but it was highly effective at accomplishing Obama's political agenda. As Obama said in a statement announcing the pick of his old friend from Illinois, “And no one I know is better at getting things done than Rahm Emanuel.” But, he continued, “[t]hough Rahm understands how to get things done in Washington, he still looks at the world from the perspective of his neighbors and constituents on the northwest side of Chicago, who work long and hard, and ask only that their government stand on their side and honor their values.” For his part, Emanuel responded, “I'm leaving a job I love to join your White House for one simple reason—like the record amount of voters who cast their ballot over the last month, I want to do everything I can to help deliver the change America needs.” Here's what he has to say on partisanship and participation:

On the difference between partisanship and honest political disagreement:

Maybe it comes from growing up in a Jewish home where screaming was the decibel you used, but I don't believe every disagreement is partisan. . . . Now if I say, “Hey, you're a jerk,” that's partisan. And that's getting into personal. But what happens is,

and no disrespect, but the elite media make every disagreement a partisan disagreement. It isn't partisan, it's a real policy. And what you can't do, nor should you ever do, is drive politics out of politics. That'd be just bureaucracy. Politics is a good thing. It's how we settle our differences. And through this homogenization of debate, we're saying that every debate is a partisan debate. It isn't. It's a political debate about political differences.

On keeping the republic:

First of all you want to do something with your life. You never know when the Good Lord is going to call your number up. And this is one place in the world, one society where you can leave your thumbprint on this and try to make the world a little better—in your own view better. Second, I see and believe that public service is community service. And when you see the kind of practice my father built and what my mother did, and where I came from and also my grandfather and grandmother on both sides, giving something back to your country and this community is central. . . . Get involved in public service. That could mean a community group, that could be a neighborhood group, that could mean an interest group on some issue, that could mean public office. A campaign. But get involved in your public life. We spend enough time with our iPods, TVs, computers—being individuals. Somewhere else in your life find a way to be part of your community . . . and I think you'll find something that's enriching and also something that allows you to contribute. That's different from anything else you're ever going to do in your life.

Source: Rahm Emanuel spoke with Christine Barbour and Gerald Wright on May 17, 2005.