**Former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta Urges Renewed Bipartisanship Amidst Political Gridlock**

The modern era of politics has been defined by gridlock and hyper-partisanship in Washington. The 118th Congress is on track to be the most unproductive in history. Only 27 bills were signed into law in 2023.

Against this backdrop of political dysfunction, former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta has emerged as a vocal advocate for renewed bipartisanship and civil engagement in American democracy.

“The Reality is today there are deep partisan divisions. There's an unwillingness to sit down and to compromise on these issues,” Panetta said. “You pay a price when our government does not respond to the critical issues facing the American people.”

Panetta referenced a bipartisan immigration bill that failed this February. After months of negotiations the bill's chances of passage died after former President Donald Trump gave his disapproval.

“He wanted division. And so when you're facing that kind of politics, it makes it really difficult to try to bring together a comprehensive approach,” Panetta said.

Panetta began his career in politics in 1966 as a senate aide. He then served in Congress from 1977 to 1993. During this time he witnessed an era where both parties worked together constantly and remained friendly.

He remembers the relationship of former Democratic speaker of the House Tip O'neill and Republican minority leader Bob Michel. The two represented different ideologies, and served as rivals in elections.

But he saw them put that aside when it came to big issues facing America. They would push their conferences to find ways to work together.

“We've lost that in Washington because there are members now that are not interested in finding a compromise consensus in government. They're interested basically in defeating the other side,” Panetta said.

Since 1997 he has run The Panetta Institute with his wife. One of its signature programs is a fellowship for law students. They are tasked with finding an issue of their choice, researching the democratic and Republican priorities on the topic. Then they present what a compromise looks like.

This is the model he wants to see return to Washington.

“That's what governance is all about. Your ability to have both sides present their views in a civil way. And then determine what compromise will look like,” he said.