The same Congress that has a problem with how they treat women has a larger problem in how they treat everyone. They use their “bully pulpit” not to lead, but to bully. And, the media is their grand enabler. It seems the nation needs a pediatrician - who has never seen toddlers or teenagers act as poorly - to issue a wake up call. Our country needs a time out, a reset. Taking an hour of mandatory sensitivity training, issuing a tweet about the harms of bullying and your concern for its victims contributes little when your actions belie your words. The as yet, unsubstantiated character assassination of Rear Admiral Ronny Jackson, who has now withdrawn from consideration as Secretary of Veterans Affairs is as good an example of bullying as we can find.

This is not about politics, it is about civility – it is on the most basic level about doing unto others as you would like them to do for you. It is about how we can actually solve core issues that are plaguing society and contributing to its many ails (thereby improving public health). Our culture is in crisis, ignoring that is malpractice.

I had the distinct pleasure of recently meeting Dr. Jackson at the White House and spending an afternoon with him. I like him. I cannot comment on the allegations. But, I can long for a world that would value the sacrifices a serviceman like him has made (to guarantee all of our safety) enough to perform a thorough investigation as a first measure, instead of a trashing campaign spearheaded by Congress and its media minions to destroy a life’s work in three days.
Dr. Jackson has up until this week been felt to have honorably served three presidential administrations (Bush, Obama and Trump) with glowing reviews. There were no questions about his behavior two weeks ago, no Congressional concerns about the man trusted with the care of our president. Not until hours till a confirmation hearing when it is of last ditch political expediency did any issue in this realm arise and without any formal opportunity for him to defend himself. Where in all of this is the “thank you for your service” tagline that follows any Congressional statement about our veterans. Should we believe their words or their actions?

How’s this for some reality testing. The political class whose rampant outrage over the notion of veterans receiving poor treatment often calling it a “travesty,” just perpetrated this “travesty.” If the accusations prove untrue, then veterans will have lost a genuine, authentic champion.

Bullying is a growing health problem. What do you think contributes to disaffected youth’s feelings of isolation? Bullying. Lack of compassion, empathy and sense of belonging. Summarily dismissing people as disposable. That is not an excuse, but a partial explanation. Only when this is understood can there be any inroads. This partisan rage from all fronts and clinging to such self-preservation has made a mockery of the notion of a civil society. Maybe leading by example and walking the talk could pay dividends you can’t imagine – then many of our policies wouldn’t wind up being band-aids on ruptured arteries, rather real solutions. You genuinely wish to solve the opioid crisis or make an impact on gun violence, then take heed.

As my loving, brilliant mother always says, “when you achieve perfection, feel free to criticize me.” Who among us, especially in Congress or the media, has been continuously perfect in life, at all moments, phases and stages? The answer is no one. Maybe we need a Congressional panel on not casting stones.

Disagreeing with an individual’s readiness for a job is fair game especially for a job caring for our veterans. We can all agree it is the highest of stakes. Allegations of wrongdoing should be comprehensively evaluated and dealt with purposefully and commensurate with the seriousness of their nature. But when bullies cast stones for sport and political advantage, as theater not governance we have a problem. When you present yourself as squeaky clean – already having demonstrated hypocrisy regarding the sexual harassment of women, you are now demonstrating how bullies act. We can all be better.

Congress, if you decide at some future point to return to leadership rather than partisan squabbling, you might want to demonstrate leadership through your actions. The turning point is now.

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