

## Across the aisle: Senators demonstrate the power of civil discourse at Tulane

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Louisiana Senators Patrick Connick, a Republican (left), and Gary Carter Jr., a Democrat (right), came together to demonstrate how civil discourse shapes their work on infrastructure and public policy at Across the Aisle, a gathering organized by the Tulane School of Architecture and Built Environment.

A Republican and a Democrat who often find themselves on opposite sides of issues shared a stage at Tulane recently — not to argue, but to demonstrate how civil discourse shapes their work on infrastructure and public policy.

Louisiana State Senators Patrick Connick, a Republican, and Gary Carter Jr., a Democrat, serve together as chair and vice chair of the Louisiana Senate Transportation, Highways and Public Works Committee. Both represent portions of

Jefferson and Plaquemines parishes and regularly work together on issues including transportation funding, coastal restoration, ports and water infrastructure.

At Across the Aisle, a gathering organized by the Tulane School of Architecture and Built Environment last week, both lawmakers explained how their working relationship functions.

Carter reflected on how his and Connick's bipartisanship evolved. He recalled early "tense" disagreements with Connick while both served in the Louisiana House of Representatives. But their opposing opinions sparked more than debates.

"It kind of forced us to become friends," Carter said.

In the Senate, he added, members sit together and interact frequently. "Even though you disagree with someone ... we can find common ground."

Connick discussed efforts to strengthen coordination among Louisiana's ports, which have historically operated independently. Greater collaboration among the ports, as well as among lawmakers could improve Louisiana's competitiveness with other Gulf Coast states, he said.

"We unfortunately sometimes get set in our ways, but we've got to change that," Connick said.

Tulane Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost Robin Forman, who opened the event, reinforced the evening's theme.

He noted that the university has been enhancing this aspect of its mission through initiatives such as the Future of Energy Forum, the State of the Nation project, the New Orleans Book Fest at Tulane University and the recently announced Tulane Center for Civil Discourse. Forman added, "We are weaker when we're not working together. We are weaker as communities, as leaders and as decision-makers when we're not having conversations across the aisle."

Iñaki Alday, dean of the School of Architecture and Built Environment, said that the school served as a fitting convenor for the event.

"Infrastructure is a key area of research and study at the Tulane School of Architecture and Built Environment at many scales — from coastal landscapes to transportation to community resilience hubs — and a major condition for the common good and the future of our region. Therefore, the school is an ideal forum for discussions coming from different political and professional positions," he said.

Louisiana state Senators Patrick Connick (left) and Gary Carter Jr. (right) discussed how bipartisanship has helped them work together on common goals.