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In [House](#) and [Senate](#) intelligence committee hearings last Wednesday, legislators blasted Russia for running social media ads designed to inflame divisions in the United States. One ad, for example, promoted a rally to celebrate a new Islamic center in Houston, while another promoted a counter-demonstration. That's [called](#) playing both ends against the middle. And it's a trick Congress knows well and should stop.

Consider this Monday's [hearings](#) on the Republican tax proposal. Democrats urged anger at Republicans for wanting to cut taxes for the rich, and Republicans urged anger at Democrats for opposing reforms needed to promote growth and jobs, but neither party tells us how it would change current taxing and spending policies which, if continued, will lead to financial disaster. The legislators of both parties cover up their flight from fiscal responsibility by whipping up hatred.

Then, with regulation, Republicans accuse Democrats of killing jobs by over-regulating companies, and Democrats accuse Republicans of killing children by under-regulating polluters, but legislators from neither party want to vote on the regulations themselves.

Voting to approve regulations would result in responsibility for the burdens they impose and voting to disapprove them would result in responsibility for the harms their disapproval would allow. Because legislators duck such responsibility, they fail to fix flaws in our highly complicated and usually obsolete statutes that keep agencies from offering regulations that provide greater protection with smaller burdens. So, again, the legislators promote antagonism to mask their own failure to serve us.

Worse still, while Republicans have put forth a [bill](#) that they claim evidences their desire to vote on major regulations, it is designed in a way that ensures that they will never actually have to take vote.

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In addition to requiring votes, the bill contains many anti-regulatory features that are anathema to Democrats so that it can never attract the Democratic support in the Senate needed to be enacted. Democrats, for their part, fail to offer an alternative bill that would simply require votes. So, Republicans accuse Democrats of shirking responsibility for regulation and Democrats accuse Republicans of wanting to block all regulation. The upshot is that all legislators avoid responsibility for the hard choices required to give us smarter regulation.

Even in decisions to go to war, legislators substitute accusations for responsibility. After the sad spectacle of legislators of both parties blaming presidents of both parties for the unpopular Vietnam War, Democrats and Republicans in Congress joined in passing the [War Powers Resolution](#). It theoretically calls for the president to get congressional approval for military campaigns.

In fact, however, Congress and presidents purportedly collude to avoid votes in Congress if the decision is controversial. For example, legislators of both parties urged President Barack Obama to strike [Libya](#) in 2011, but not to seek a vote in Congress under the War Powers Resolution. After he took their advice, some had the [gall](#) to criticize him for not seeking approval from Congress. So, while our soldiers are under fire overseas, their supporters and war protestors, as well as presidents and anti-war legislators, face off on the home front.

There are [other ways](#) that legislators pit Americans against each for their own advantage, but you already get the point.

At last week's hearings on Russia's meddling, legislators called for Congress to pass a statute preventing Facebook and other social media platforms from running divisive ads sponsored by foreign entities.

Whether that makes sense, Congress's first responsibility should be to keep itself from playing both ends against the middle. It is clear how to do so. My [Honest Deal Act](#) would, for example, force legislators to vote on major agency decisions to regulate or deregulate.

The question is whether the honorables in Congress want to behave honorably.

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