

# Civility Project disbands after low interest in Congress

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WASHINGTON (RNS) The Civility Project, a two-year bipartisan attempt to get politicians and others to respect one another, is closing down after just three members of Congress agreed to the project's pledge.

"You three were alone in pledging to be civil," Christian publicist Mark DeMoss wrote in a Jan. 3 letter announcing an end to the two-year project. "I must admit to scratching my head as to why only three members of Congress, and no governors, would agree to what I believe is a rather low bar."

The three who had agreed were Sen. Joseph Lieberman, I-Conn., Rep. Sue Myrick, R-N.C., and Rep. Frank Wolf, R-Va.

The announcement comes at a time when politicians, clergy and commentators have stressed the need for civility following Saturday's (Jan. 8) deadly shootings in Tucson, Ariz., which left six people dead and 14 wounded, including Rep. Gabrielle Giffords, who was shot in the head.

DeMoss, a Republican who represents prominent evangelical leaders through his Atlanta-based public relations firm, teamed with Democratic consultant Lanny Davis when he launched the project prior to President Obama's inauguration.

They asked people to agree to three pledges on the project's website -- to be civil in public discourse, respect those with whom you disagree, and stand against incivility. DeMoss said thousands of people signed the online pledge but others posted vulgar comments on the site.

"I'm worried about where we're headed as a country on the civility scale," he wrote to the lawmakers, before Saturday's massacre in Tucson.

Davis could not be reached immediately for comment.

As the project ends, leaders of a faith-based network called People Improving Communities through Organizing (PICO) have asked people to sign a "pledge for our better selves," in the wake of the Arizona killings. It reads, in part:

"I commit to honor the legacy of the victims in Arizona by continuing to engage in public life, fostering a civil dialogue on issues that impact our communities and creating safe spaces for people to participate in democracy."