

After the bums are thrown out

By [David Heim](#)

November 24, 2010

Stanford historian David Kennedy [likens](#) our political era to the Gilded Age of the late 19th century, when there was lots of political turbulence but very little political action.

U.S. presidents during the Gilded Age were a series of unmemorable, "bearded, bland and boring" men who left "but the faintest of tracks in the historical record." The dynamism of the country was in the economic sphere, not in politics. It took decades--until the Progressive Era, says Kennedy---before politicians were able to take on the great issues of the day.

Let's grant Kennedy's point: we are living in an era of volatile "throw the bums out" political activity but little meaningful action. (For example, there's hardly any hope that Congress will address the issue of carbon emissions and climate change in the foreseeable future.)

The situation simply underscores a persistent truth: political results cannot be the measure of meaningful action, at least not for Christians.

Whatever happens or doesn't happen at the level of politics, churches have the space to change lives and shape minds and hearts. Churches can mobilize local actions on poverty, health and the environment. Churches can speak the truth. That's real action, and someday the politicians will want to catch up.