http://newiprogressive.com/images/stories/S5/critic-bridge-2-s5.jpg 

We Americans always will have our disagreements. But three goals should be about right and wrong rather than left and right. Create an economy that serves all, making education affordable, and bringing high-speed Internet and mobile phone service to every doorstep.

ALTOONA, WI - No doubt about it, Americans are at each other's throats , politically speaking. Some consider themselves Democrats, and most of them are not terribly fond of their party but absolutely can't stand Republicans. Others call themselves Republicans, and most who do have no great love of their party either but are driven mad by Democrats.

Most numerous of all are the independents, who are turned off by both and refuse to wear either major party label. But even self-described independents tend to lean when it comes time to vote, reliably favoring one of the major parties. The thing is, these days they lean not toward what they like most but rather in the opposite direction of what they fear and hate.

Against this backdrop, it can be hard to see where to even start the search for common ground in America.

Part of the problem is that we've all been conditioned to think and talk about politics in ways that drive wedges between us and make us active participants in our own disempowerment. One secret to escaping the trap we're in is to consciously and creatively work to change our political vocabulary, discarding words like "left" and "right" and "liberal" or "conservative" in favor of terms that could knit us together instead of tear us apart.

Another strategy worth giving a try is to steer conversations away from programs and policies

and ideologies and toward discussions of what kind of society we want. We argue about things like food stamps and other forms of public assistance. One person sees a safety net, another sees a hammock. The argument accomplishes nothing except to further convince each that the other is evil.

How about changing the conversation, focusing instead on how to create an economy where if you work you won't be poor? Each side has no choice but to admit that we don't currently have such an economy. That's some common ground right there. Some more might be found once we start talking about how to build one.

Here are three goals for our country that are about right and wrong rather than left and right.

Create an economy that makes the term "working poor" disappear from our vocabulary. This is no small task. But if we can't all agree that those who go to work every day should not go hungry or be unable to afford shelter, then what kind of nation do we have? Who are we as a people?

If we're serious about reaching this goal, there are at least two others that need to be pursued too.

When most people in this country lived off the land, a high school diploma wasn't essential to making a decent living. When most American workers moved to factories and offices, more schooling was needed. In this digital age and with the emergence of an increasingly global economy, living the American Dream depends on even more education and training. That being the case, there has to be a commitment to **making education as affordable for our kids and grandkids as past generations made it for us** . The education needed to be able to live the kind of life I wanted to live was remarkably inexpensive and readily attainable in my youth. Today's young people are being buried under a mountain of debt to get what they need to make it in life. That's not right.

And given the world we now live in, you can't run a business or do most jobs or fully participate in American life without access to 21st Century information and communications technology. Every American needs it. Not every American has it. That reality challenges us to do what it takes to **bring high-speed Internet and mobile phone service to every American doorstep**.

We Americans always will have our disagreements. But let’s at least try to argue about how to reach goals we all can agree on.

— *Mike McCabe*