After watching Donald Trump’s prime-time address to the nation on the alleged border crisis, as well as Wednesday’s very personal admonishments by both Congressional Democrat and Republican leaders following another unsuccessful meeting with the President, one thing is clear: the issue of the proposed wall and the debate over how to end the government shutdown are not genuine public policy disputes.

They are better characterized as two competing public relations campaigns—a rhetorical war, if you will. Regardless of one’s political stands on these issues, for both sides, arguably the Republicans more so, this seems to boil down to a concern for winning and losing where controlling the narrative supersedes finding a solution.

As someone who has studied and taught political communication and argument for more than 40 years, this is a sad realization in a democracy that was founded and premised on the practice of thoughtful deliberation, reason and compromise. If this state of affairs does not change, our nation’s great experiment may not survive.

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