By Bill Lambrecht, St. Louis Post-Dispatch
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WASHINGTON — The word bipartisan doesn't sound often in the polarized environment of Washington these days. Rep. Russ Carnahan hopes to start a trend.

Carnahan, D-St. Louis, and Rep. Anh "Josehp" Cao, R-La., held a news conference this morning to announce formation of the American Engagement Caucus — House Democrats and Republicans working together to promote international cooperation on key issues. Cao is the first Vietnamese-American elected to Congress.

Carnahan said that the Haitian earthquake crisis and the attempted Christmas Day terrorist attack underscore the need for better cooperation. The caucus also is designed to help foster better trade, he said.

"In times of economic challenge, often times we see the resurgence of isolationist ideas and rhetoric," he said at a news conference in a packed hearing room.

Carnahan, who is chairman of the House Foreign Affairs subcommittee on international organizations and human rights, said he sees the new caucus as a way to improve relationships between political parties in Washington.

"It is a way to break down some of the barriers in what has been a very partisan environment in Washington, and in an election year, it gets whipped up even more," he said in an interview.

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