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Senate

The Senate met at 11 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

O Lord and Ruler, Your Name is great, and we see Your glory in the Heavens. We are grateful for this Nation and for the deliberative process of lawmaking, with its challenges and opportunities. As our Senators debate the issues that are vital to our freedom, give them wisdom, integrity, and courage. Lord, let them be fully persuaded in their minds about the course that will best bless America. Deliver them from a reluctance to respect honest differences as they remember their ultimate accountability to You. Bless and keep them now and always.

We pray in Your great Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SCOTT of Florida). The Senate majority leader is recognized.

S. RES. 50

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday, the Senate took an important step to restore sense and order to the way we approach the Executive Calendar. It is one of this body's most important responsibilities. Yet it has been hampered recently by a campaign of systematic and comprehensive ob-

struction that stands literally without precedent in American history.

I won't restate each part of our debate from the floor yesterday, but the objective facts of this situation are unambiguous. For the past 2 years, we have witnessed the accelerated erosion of the norms by which this body has historically considered Presidential nominations. We have seen a disappointing series of records broken in the process, such as 128 cloture votes on nominations in this President's first 2 years—more than 5 times as many as in the same period of every administration since Jimmy Carter, combined. Forty-two executive branch positions took cloture votes for the first time ever.

This has been a new level of paralysis, surrounding even the most qualified and least controversial nominees. In a way, it has been the natural outgrowth of the erosion on nominations that began back in 2003 when our current Democratic leader helped spur his side of the aisle to walk away from longstanding institutional norms and declare the Executive Calendar open season for regular, chronic filibuster tactics and forced cloture votes. That is when this relatively new mess began in earnest.

In 2013, in a truly bipartisan vote, a number of Republicans, including me, joined with Democrats to implement new expedited procedures for lower tier nominees. We put them in place right at the beginning of President Obama's second term, even as we on this side were still licking our wounds from the previous November's election result.

This week, our Democratic colleagues had the chance to reciprocate. They had the opportunity to do the parallel thing, exactly the same thing, and vote to limit undue Senate delays for this Republican administration the same way we Republicans did for President Obama's administration. Oh, but they weren't interested.

These days, I am sorry to say, the other side of the aisle seems to be

dominated by pure partisanship over absolutely everything else. Remember, it wasn't long ago that this current behavior would have appeared unimaginable. Just a few decades ago, the idea of routinely forcing 60-vote thresholds and extra delays on nominations was firmly in third-rail territory. Well, a lot has happened since then, but I hope my colleagues share my belief that the Senate's traditions and norms are its greatest assets. In that respect, yesterday was a very good day for this body as an institution.

The Senate has historically been defined by two traditions. One has preserved the power of the minority in considering legislation—to pump the brakes or force a second look. That includes the legislative filibuster, which I know many of us on both sides are 100 percent committed to preserving. In my view and in the view of many, it is inseparable from the way this body was designed. It is what keeps the Senate from swinging wildly back and forth between each party's entire agenda.

I don't think my Democratic colleagues who are running for President and publicly toying with undermining the legislative filibuster would be too keen to see Republicans enact our entire, full-tilt conservative agenda with just 51 votes, because some day the shoe will be on the other foot. The shoe, in fact, always at some point ends up on the other foot.

That is one tradition.

The second tradition, concerning nominations, has always been different. For decades and decades, it allowed for a reasonable process for the vast majority of Presidents' nominees. Yesterday, even though Democrats walked away and Republicans had to act alone, we took a big step toward restoring that second part of Senate tradition.

I am sure yesterday's progress has not resolved every sore spot. I feel certain that we have not seen the last of our Democratic colleagues' addiction

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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