

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT
AGREEMENT—H.R. 927

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that notwithstanding rule XXII of the standing rules of the Senate, Senators have until close of business today to file first-degree amendments to the substitute amendment to H.R. 927, the Cuba Libertad bill, in conjunction with the cloture vote to take place on Tuesday of next week.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GRASSLEY. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. ASHCROFT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. ASHCROFT. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that I be allowed to speak as if in morning business for such time as I may consume.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC'S DISSATISFACTION WITH CONGRESS
r the quorum call be rescinded.

Mr. ASHCROFT. Mr. President, the American public's dissatisfaction with the Congress is again on the rise. The American public's faith in its elected leaders is waning, and I think there are reasons for this disturbing trend.

I think it is because when the people look at Washington, DC, they are beginning again to see what they have seen in years past. They see business as usual. They see politicians putting self-interest first and politics first. They see politicians perhaps then moving to parochial interests or just the interests of a small part of the country. The national interest, it seems, follows somewhere after the special interests. But it takes a long time, as people watch this body deliberate, for them to see us finally get to the national interest. It sees a body in deliberation that finds it very difficult to confront the issues that the people have actually sent us here to confront.

In short, I think the American people see an imperial Congress, a Congress that is perceived to be arrogant and indifferent and out of touch, and seen so because the agenda of the people is accorded a standing which is simply disproportionately low compared to the standing of the political interests, the special interests, the provincial or parochial interests.

I think it is important that we begin again to restate and redemonstrate our commitment to the agenda of the American people. As the people grow in their dissatisfaction, they manifest their disapproval in a number of ways which are clear and apparent.

Approval ratings of Congress are at an all-time low again. We have man-

aged to snatch from the jaws of victory a defeat here. The American people were beginning to think that they could count on us for reform. As a matter of fact, there are a number of substantial reforms which we have undertaken. We have made a commitment to balance the budget in 7 years, and that is important. And we are on track for doing it. That is significantly different than the President of the United States who said he wants to balance the budget in 10 years. But if you look through the smoke and mirrors of those 10 years, you find that they are predicated upon administration figures, and they do not have the integrity or validity of the Congressional Budget Office bipartisan figures that the Congress is using.

It is a shame when we are making that kind of progress, when we are doing welfare reform that is substantial and will make a real difference, when we are addressing major issues, that we again are falling in the approval of the American people. But I think it is because they see some of the endemic, old-time politics as usual rising again to the surface. You see our two-party system being questioned and people talking about a third party and people discussing the potential of independent candidates with an alarming frequency and with a tremendous—well, it is an alarming array of support. There is a new desire for a third party and a reincarnation again of Ross Perot.

I think we need to demonstrate that, as American people, we are a different kind of Congress, that this Congress which was elected in 1994 is a Congress where our rhetoric is matched by our resolve. It is a Congress where our agenda meets the agenda and the challenges of the American people. It is a Congress where our greatest concern is not losing a vote but losing the faith of the American people.

I think in order to reacquire the confidence of the people we have to be willing again to tackle the toughest issues—issues like the balanced budget and term limits which represent fundamental systemic reform. We now have the opportunity to keep the faith on term limits. We are in the process of making good on our commitment for a balanced budget. But we have an opportunity to keep the faith on term limits. To do so will require courage—not the courage of shying away from fights and delaying votes, but the courage of meeting our challenges and keeping the faith with the American people. We came here to change Washington. We need to ensure that Washington does not change us.

There are lessons to be learned, lessons about how to get things done, about how to be most effective, about how not to spin our wheels, how to take advantage of the rules so we are not dislocated in our efforts for achievement by those who are much more familiar with the process than we are.

But there are things that we do not want to learn here in Washington. We do not want to learn about sacrificing our principles or setting aside the agenda of the American people.

We do not want to learn how to avoid or skirt dealing with the issues for which we were sent here. We do not want to learn to act just for political expedience. Those would be substantial lessons, but they would be lessons which would drive us away from the American people and drive the wedge of insecurity and a lack of confidence between the people and their representatives.

We must always be sure that we are ready to fight for principles, always stand up for what we know is right even if it means losing a vote.

As you well know, Mr. President, I am speaking about our commitment to address the issue of term limits. Why are term limits important? Because they help restore one of the first principles of the American people and the American Republic, and that is representative democracy. Term limits help ensure that there are competitive elections. When incumbents are running for public office, even in years where there is as much revolutionary change as there was in 1994, incumbents win 91 percent of the time. Yes, even in the revolution of 1994, incumbents won 91 percent of elections where they were seeking reelection.

How? Well, they use their biggest perk. That is incumbency. If you look at the data about who raises the most funds and who can just simply blow away the competition, it is the fact that incumbents have the ability to amass these war chests. They obviously have the most easy access to the media. They speak from an official position. And incumbency becomes a perk which is so big that it tilts the playing field. It is unfair to expect that there would be a massive infusion of the will of the people against incumbency, at least few are asking for it in the election, because the incumbents are so inordinately favored with the tools of politics—access to the podium and the resources that are necessary to buy advertising.

We need term limits to help ensure accountability. Individuals who know that they will be returning to their districts or to their home States to live under the very laws that they enact, I believe, will have a different kind of incentive to deal with the public interest rather than the special interests or rather than the provincial interests or rather than the political interests, to deal with the interests of this Nation. The national interests of America would be elevated if we were to embrace the concept of term limits.

Term limits would also help to ensure the right kind of voice of the people in Government by making it possible for new people and new ideas to come here. We need to open the doors of Government to the citizens of this country, and I think having reasonable