

many of those nominations were confirmed overwhelmingly and sometimes unanimously.

I have been forced to use my right as majority leader to fill what we call the amendment tree more than I would have liked to, but it has been for a simple reason. Rather than offer amendments to improve legislation or compromise for the greater good, as Members of this body have done for generations, the current minority has offered amendments simply to waste time, delay us from proceeding to a bill or for scoring political points. The American people love government, but they don't like too much politics in government.

Finally, these rules are central to the Senate, but they are not sacrosanct. Senate procedures and rules have changed since the Senate was founded at the beginning of this country when necessary and after serious consideration. Those decisions have never been made without great deliberation, and no future change should be made any differently.

The recent abuses we have seen have hurt the Senate and hurt our country. They have hurt our economic recovery, and they hurt middle-class families. They hurt the institutions that lead and shape America because they keep public servants and judges from these posts for no reason other than partisanship. Even Chief Justice Roberts criticized the Senate a few days ago for how few judges we confirmed and how slowly we do even the few we confirm. His criticism and concern are well founded. I hope all my colleagues consider the Chief Justice's warning and what it means for the pursuit of justice.

Here is the bottom line: We may not agree yet on how to fix the problem, but no one can credibly claim problems don't exist. No one who has watched this body operate since the current minority took office can say it functions just fine. That wouldn't be true. It would be dishonest. No one can deny that the filibuster has been used for purely political reasons, reasons far beyond those for which this protection was invented and intended.

I say through the Chair to my distinguished Republican counterpart, my friend, Senator McCONNELL, in the coming days, let's come together to find a solution. That is why we are here. I say to the 16 new Senators, we need to do some things to correct some of the things that have taken place. The Senate must solve problems, not create them. I am going to work to the best of my ability with my friend, the Senator from Kentucky, to work this out, to work out a compromise.

The last time Congress convened without Senator Robert Byrd as a Member, Harry Truman was President of the United States and 42 of our 100 Senators had not even been born. No one knew the Constitution better than Robert Byrd, and no one revered it more. He taught many of us many

things. Among them, he taught me to carry the Constitution with me every day.

I do that, Mr. President. I always have this copy of our founding document in my pocket, signed by Senator Byrd, one of the most fervent defenders of the Constitution. He has given me two of them. The first one wore out, but I have it in my desk in Searchlight. I have such fondness looking at what Senator Byrd wrote in it. As we all know, in his later years he had a benign tremor, and he shook a little bit when he wrote. But he wrote this, and I will always, always remember Senator Byrd, that fervent defender of this Constitution.

He loved the Constitution. This coal miner's son loved the Constitution. Just like everyone in America, whether you are a coal miner's son or an academic's son, we all should love this Constitution, not just because of what is written in it but how those words were written and how it all came together.

Senator Byrd knew our Constitution was created through compromise. At a moment of particular partisan strife, 15 years ago Senator Byrd came to this floor and said the following:

I hope that we will all take a look at ourselves on both sides of this aisle and understand also that we must work together in harmony and with mutual respect for one another. This very charter of government—

Talking about the Constitution—under which we live was created in a spirit of compromise and mutual concession. And it is only in that spirit that a continuance of this charter of government can be prolonged and sustained.

That is what he said.

Our friends in the House have decided to begin their daily business by reading the Constitution. In these first few minutes of the new Senate session, I think we should reflect on Senator Byrd's wise reminder of this Constitution's history. Like the Constitution, the agreement that established two separate and different Houses in the legislative branch was itself a compromise.

Mr. President, it is written to be the Great Compromise that allowed us to have a Constitution. As much as ever before, our two branches need to find common ground if we are going to be productive for the people we serve and serve together.

In that same speech a decade and a half ago, Senator Byrd reminded us that "the welfare of the country is more dear than the mere victory of [a political] party." I think we would do well to heed those words as we debate and decide how to best serve the Nation and its people in this new year.

Senators come and go. Majorities and minorities rotate like a rolling wheel, and records of service are written and rewritten. The only constant in this great democracy is change—a change we never anticipate. Sometimes we do, but most often we do not. Sixteen Senators who were here just a few days ago

have moved on, and 16 new ones now take their seats. Laws that govern this Nation and the rules that govern this body continually evolve carefully and by necessity.

But the most important change we can make in the 112th Congress is to work better and more closely as teammates, not as opponents; as partners, not as partisans; to fulfill our constitutional responsibility to pursue a more perfect union, establish justice, ensure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. UDALL of New Mexico). The Republican leader is recognized.

OPENING THE 112TH CONGRESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, first, I would like to take a moment to welcome back all of my colleagues and particularly the 13 new Republican Senators whom we officially swore in just a few moments ago.

Americans are looking for creative, principled leaders. I am confident this impressive class of new Republicans will not disappoint.

I would also like to welcome my good friend, the majority leader. At a time when some people think the two parties in Washington cannot even agree on the weather, I will note that Senator REID and I get along just fine. I expect it will stay that way, and I look forward to working with him again throughout this Congress.

The biggest changes today are, of course, happening across the dome, and I would like to welcome the many new Republican Members of Congress who have come to Washington to change the way things are done around here. In this, they will be led by a very talented and determined Ohioan, whom I now have the great honor of referring to as Speaker BOEHNER. I congratulate Speaker BOEHNER and the new Republican majority in the House, and I wish them great success in achieving the kinds of reforms and policies the last election was all about.

Americans want lawmakers to cut Washington spending, tackle the debt, rein in the government, and to help create the right conditions for private sector job growth. They also want us to reform the way laws are made. They are looking to Republicans to provide an alternative to the kind of lawmaking we have seen too much of around here in the past few years—a vision that disregards the views of the public in favor of an elite few, a vision that tells people they can look at legislation after it is passed, that Washington knows best. In short, Americans are looking for an entirely different approach.