

the road toward totalitarianism because they did not stand up for religious liberty. This is not a question about contraception. This is a question about religious liberty and where we are going to stand.

The fact is, once we start down the road of denying the individual rights of personal conscience and religious freedom, and begin to tell churches and synagogues what they must believe, we are on the way to losing the freedoms all of us hold dear.

Religious freedom is the first freedom mentioned in the Bill of Rights. This is important stuff. I am not Catholic. But I would fight to my death for the Catholic people to be able to live their faith. My own faith feels the same way about many of these issues. No church or person should be forced to make abortion-inducing drugs accessible, as the President's mandate will require them to do.

I do not think any compromise has been suggested so far that would meet the high bar set by our Constitution. There is only one option for the President on this issue. He needs to rescind this unlawful regulation. There is no middle ground. When it comes to the first amendment right to religious liberty, there can be no compromise.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUESTS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we have about 90 nominations on the Executive Calendar. That is a lot of names—people who have set their lives aside, after having been asked by the President of the United States to do good things for our country. The vast majority are not controversial. There is nothing so about their character, their education, their background. They have, with rare exception, been reported from the committees unanimously. They are being held up out of spite. Nominations on the Executive Calendar have been pending an average of 3 months waiting for the Senate to act. But the Senate can act on these, as we have done in years past, just like that.

Top Department Secretaries pending before the Senate—two to be specific—are very important for their leadership roles at our Federal agencies. For example, Rebecca Blank will fill the No. 2 position at the Department of Commerce. She has a Ph.D. in economics from MIT, one of the finest educational institutes in the world. She served as Acting Commerce Secretary when Secretary Locke left to become Ambassador to China. The Commerce Committee approved her, of course, by

voice vote. That means unanimously. Her confirmation is urgently needed because the Commerce Department hasn't had a confirmed deputy since July of 2010 because of the obstructionism of the Republicans here in the Senate.

Maurice Jones has been nominated to be Deputy Secretary at Housing and Urban Affairs. He worked for then-Governor MARK WARNER and at the Treasury Department in the Clinton administration. His nomination was voted out of the Banking Committee last December by voice vote.

Wendy Spencer, President's nominee to lead the Corporation for National and Community Service, has bipartisan support from a number of Republican Senators, including MARCO RUBIO.

There are also Corporation for National and Community Servicemembers on the calendar that have been waiting for a vote since July of last year. We also have law enforcement positions awaiting confirmation, including Deputy Attorney General for Tax at the Department of Justice and the agency's inspector general. Other important officials at the State Department, Treasury Department, and Homeland Security are ready for the Senate to act on their nominations.

Regrettably, Senate Republicans continue to either block, stall, or obstruct these and other well-qualified nominees. Since this past fall, a Republican Senator has blocked two nominations at the Federal Communications Commission, and today they will block nominees to the Federal Trade Commission.

This week, Senator BINGAMAN asked consent to confirm the various Department of Energy nominees and the Republicans objected. This obstruction is not about the nominees themselves. They are qualified and noncontroversial. Many came out of committee, as I have indicated, by a voice vote or unanimously.

Senate Republicans are blocking nominees for political reasons—and very weak political reasons. Not everything we do here in the Senate should be a fight. Virtually every one of these nominees could be approved today if the Senate Republicans would cooperate.

As I indicated when I started this conversation, these people, with these jobs, have put their lives aside to wait on their confirmation. I have made no secret of the fact that I think the President did the minimal with his recess appointments—the minimal. I think he has waited far too long. If something doesn't break here, I am going to recommend to the President he recess-appoint all these people—every one of them.

That is not unique. The power of the recess appointment is in our Constitution. Theodore Roosevelt, a Republican, felt he was being treated improperly by the Senate. He had 160 nominations that were being held for political reasons, and he did it in a minute—re-

cess-appointed 160 different people. So it is not as if there isn't some way to respond to this.

We are going to have a week here that we will be in recess. And I repeat, if we don't have some significant action during the next work period, I am going to ask the President to appoint them all. I can ask, if I want to. He doesn't have to respond affirmatively. We will do the judges. We will have the fight on the judges ourselves because they are recommendations we make to the President. But these are the President's nominations and he should have the right to have these people working in his administration.

Mr. President, I am going to ask unanimous consent on a large number of nominations. I have been told that on every one of these, the Republicans will object. I was asked whether it was necessary that I have a Republican come here and do it in person. That is not necessary. I take the word of my friend, the Republican leader, that that in fact is the case. So on every one of these I am going to object on behalf of the Republicans. How do you like that?

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations: Calendar Nos. 86, 258, 259, 261, 262, 263, 264, 338, 339, 340, 344, 345, 346, 403, 422, 450, 456, 493, 494, 495, 496, 499, 500, 501, 502, 504, 505, 506, 507, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 541, 542, 543, 544, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 571 and 572.

I am told those nominations that are before the Senate now dealing with the Air Force, Army, Foreign Service, the Marine Corps, and the Navy will be agreed to. I hope that in fact is the case. It is not part of this request.

On the numbers I have read off, I ask unanimous consent that the nominations be confirmed en bloc, the motions to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table, with no intervening action or debate; that no further motions be in order to any of the nominations; that any related statements be printed in the RECORD, that President Obama be immediately notified of the Senate's action, and the Senate then resume legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REID. On behalf of the Republicans, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. REID. I ask unanimous consent that we now proceed to executive session to consider the following nominations: Calendar Nos. 573 to 606—those are the ones I referred to, the military only—and all nominations placed on the Secretary's desk in the Air Force,