

I am proud of the budget we passed. I think it is a very good budget, but I realize if we go to conference we may have to change some of the things we have in our budget. But we are never going to get this done unless we sit down and work this out, as we have done for more than two centuries here in conferences between the House and the Senate.

STUDENT LOAN INTEREST RATES

Mr. REID. Finally, I see on the floor my friend, the senior Senator from Tennessee, who has been a longtime Governor of his State. He has been the Secretary of Education. We have an issue coming up soon. If we do not work something out in this body before the end of this month, student loan interest rates will go up a lot. If we do nothing, they will double from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent. If we do what the House wants to do, if we do what Senate Republicans want to do, these student loans will be used to reduce the debt. I do not think that is what we should be doing with students. While this is not the time to debate this issue, everyone should be aware as we deal with immigration over the next couple weeks, we also have to keep this matter on the radar screen that we are going to have to do something about.

I have a number of meetings on this today, and I am sure my Republican colleagues have meetings throughout the day, and we need to have as many as we can to work something out to get this done.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. COWAN). The Republican leader is recognized.

SENATE RULES

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, day after day I have been coming to the Senate floor to remind the majority leader of the commitments he made to the American people in 2011 and again just a few months ago that he would not break the rules of the Senate in order to change the rules of the Senate; that he would preserve the rights of the minority in this body; that he would not try to remake the Senate in the image of the House, something that could change our democracy in a very fundamental way.

So the question remains: Will he keep his word?

Here is what he said on January 27, 2011:

I will oppose any effort in this Congress or the next—

The one we are in now—

to change the Senate's rules other than through the regular order.

And here is what he said this year, after I asked him to confirm that the Senate would not consider any rules

changes that did not go through the regular order process:

That is correct. Any other resolutions related to Senate procedure would be subject to a regular order process including consideration by the Rules Committee.

Now, look, Mr. President, a Senator's word—especially the word of the majority leader—is the currency of the realm in this Chamber—the currency of the realm in this Chamber. As the majority leader himself said:

Your word is your bond . . . if you tell [a Republican Senator or a Democratic Senator] you are going to do something, that is the way it is.

He is entirely correct. Senators keeping their word, well, that is just vital to a well-functioning Senate. But it is only part of the equation. We also need well-established rules that are clear, fair, and preserve the rights of all Senators—including those in the minority—to represent the views of their States and of their constituents. That is the other reason why I have been pressing the majority leader on this issue.

As a matter of principle, holding a Senator to his or her word is important, but so is preserving a Senate that works the way it is supposed to. And we cannot be assured of that until the majority leader affirmatively states that he will stay true to the commitments he has made.

I understand my friend the majority leader is under a lot of pressure. I have known him for a long time, and deep down I know he understands the far-reaching consequences of "going nuclear." I think he actually realizes how terrible an idea that would be because once the Senate definitively breaks the rules to change the rules, the pressure to respond in kind will be irresistible to future majorities. The precedent will have been firmly and dramatically set.

Some Washington Democrats say: Oh, they just want to limit the rules change to nominations; they just want to make a little adjustment on nominations, which is why they have been hurtling the Senate toward a manufactured fight over a couple of the President's most controversial nominees. But Republicans have been treating the President's nominees more than fairly.

At this point in President Bush's second term he had a total of 10 judicial confirmations; and, by the way, the Republicans were in the majority in the Senate. President Bush, at this point in his second term, with a Republican majority in the Senate, had 10 judicial confirmations. So far in his second term, President Obama has had 26 judges confirmed—26, 26 to 10. Apples to apples: at this point in President Bush's term, with a Republican Senate; at this point in President Obama's term, with a Democratic Senate.

I would note that just yesterday the Senate approved two more judicial nominees. That leaves just five—just five—available to the full Senate to be confirmed. There are only five around

here. Think about that. Of the 77 Federal judicial vacancies, the President has not nominated anyone for most of them, and only 5 remain on the Senate's Executive Calendar. Moreover, only one of those nominees has been waiting more than a month to be considered.

So it is hard to see this as anything other than a manufactured crisis. There is no factual basis for it—a manufactured crisis. So the question is, a crisis to what end? Where does this lead us?

Well, one of the reasons the majority leader has refrained from changing the rules thus far is this: He fully understands—he fully understands—that majorities are fleeting, but changes to the rules are not, and breaking the rules to change the rules would fundamentally change the Senate.

Future majorities would be looking to this precedent. I do not know what the future holds, but 2 years from now I could be setting the agenda around here. Once deployed, the nuclear option may have fallout in future Congresses, actually forever altering the deliberative nature of the Senate, which has made it the institution where enduring compromises between the parties have been forged.

So it is time for sober consideration of the direction in which the Senate is being taken.

I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will be in a period of morning business for 1 hour, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees, with the Republicans controlling the first half.

The Senator from Tennessee.

FILIBUSTERS

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, for the last few weeks, I have been listening to the Republican leader ask the majority leader not to turn the Senate into a place where a majority of 51 can do anything it wants. I am on the Senate floor today to suggest three reasons why I believe the majority leader will not do that:

No. 1, he said he would not. Senators keep their word.

No. 2, in 2007, the majority leader said to do so would be the end of the Senate. There have not been many majority leaders in the history of the Senate. I know none of them want to have written on their tombstone: He presided over "the end of the Senate."