

During a dinner meeting with King Abdullah, we were joined by Jim Wolfenson, the former head of the World Bank. Dr. Wolfenson was recently selected, as my colleagues know, by President Bush to handle the upcoming Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, focusing on the quartet of partners and building the appropriate support. I applaud the President for his choice in this emissary. Not only is Dr. Wolfenson eminently capable, but he knows many of the important players directly, professionally, and personally, and he appreciates the stakes and I am confident he can get the job done.

Dr. Wolfenson understands the transition must go well. If it does not, violent unrest and instability could destroy this, what I believe is a historic chance for peace. The Jordanians have been an invaluable partner in Operation Enduring Freedom. They have made tremendous contributions to the Iraqi people's efforts to secure a free and prosperous Iraq.

We have witnessed the extraordinary bravery of the Iraqis at the polling booths and at the police recruitment centers. They have been willing to defy the terrorists and assume an active role in securing democracy.

Many of those courageous Iraqis are acquiring the training and skills needed to defend their country by completing a security course and police training regimen in Jordan.

We had the opportunity, while in Jordan, to visit the Jordan-Iraq Police Training Center, a truly unique effort where 16 countries have come together, including the United States, Jordan, Britain, Canada, Finland, and others, to train the Iraqi security force—to train the Iraqi police. The director of the facility is John Moseby, a highly qualified veteran of the U.S. Air Force.

The center's goal in Jordan is to train 32,000 Iraqi police by December 2005. Already, the center has graduated over 15,000 recruits, who have gone back to Iraq to serve in security positions. There are currently 40 Iraqi trainers at the site in Jordan, and the center hopes to add another 60. It sits on about 450 acres and can train about 3,500 cadets per session.

I wanted to go to the Jordan-Iraq Police Training Center to see firsthand how those exercises are conducted because there has been some question in the past as to the adequacy and the quality of that training. Having had the opportunity to meet the cadets, both an incoming class and classes that were leaving, viewing many of the exercises, viewing, with the leaders there, the commitment to a quality curriculum, I am very reassured they are doing an outstanding job in training those Iraqi recruits to go back and keep their communities and their streets safe.

The Iraqi cadets told us of their hope and appreciation for America's help in building a new Iraq. I am confident that by their courage and their commitment, freedom will prevail in Iraq

and the dark forces that now threaten their country will be defeated.

The trip throughout the Middle East was fascinating and informative. We met many vibrant and thoughtful people. Again and again, you hear, throughout all the countries, this expressed hope, the universal dream of hope that the people of the Middle East will one day be truly free—free from violence and oppression, free to express their will through democratically elected leaders, free to express themselves in the town square without fear of violence or terrorism.

I do applaud President Bush for his vision and for his unwavering belief in the dignity and rights of all people. From Darfur to Damascus, from Baghdad to Beirut, liberty is the hope of mankind.

Here in the Senate, I encourage and urge my colleagues to continue to do our part to ensure that these principles help shape the future of the Middle East. I believe together, with our partners around the globe, we can spread prosperity and peace. I believe it is the only way.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The minority leader is recognized.

ISRAEL

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I have listened to the leader's statements these past days on his trip to the Middle East. It is a fascinating place. I returned about a month ago myself. But the one thing that I always see in the Middle East is this tiny, little State of Israel, surrounded by these other countries that are about as undemocratic as a country could be.

Israel is a democracy. Every day we hear about what is going on in the Middle East, we should realize that. Israel has risen above this. They maintain their democratic principles in spite of the violence that is going on, on a daily basis, in that part of the world.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, yesterday afternoon the majority leader and I met one last time trying to reach a compromise that would avert the so-called nuclear option. The so-called nuclear option is nothing that we named. I know for cosmetic purposes those in the majority now have tried to call it a "constitutional option," which must be directly out of Orwell's book "1984" because it means everything but a constitutional option. The name came from the Republican leadership last year. So the "nuclear option" is a name from the majority, not us.

I do not know if they met with my friend, Frank Luntz, or with whom

they met to change the name from "nuclear option" to a softer sounding proposal, "constitutional option." As I said, violating 217 years of standard procedure in the Senate, changing the rules by breaking the rules, is about as far as you could get from a constitutional option.

But it appears that my distinguished friend, the majority leader, cannot accept any solution which does not guarantee all current and future judicial nominees an up-or-down vote. That result is unacceptable to me because it is inconsistent with constitutional checks and balances. It would essentially eliminate the role of the Senate minority in confirming judicial nominations and turn the Senate into a rubber stamp for the President's choices. In fact, the majority should look carefully at what they are getting because not only would this eliminate the role of the Senate's minority but also the majority in judicial confirmations. The majority would be eliminated, too. The Senate would no longer have a role.

I can only conclude that the true purpose of the nuclear option is not to win confirmation of some or all of the small handful of nominees Democrats filibustered last year. Remember, today it stands at 208 to 10. And focusing on the number 10 is somewhat misleading because of the 10, 3 have either withdrawn or retired. And we have said, time and time again, that 2 of the remaining 7 we would agree to 10 minutes from now—2 Michigan judges. So it is really 208 to 5—208 to 5.

So the goal, it appears to me, of the Republican leadership—and note I do not say of the mainstream Republicans in this country, I do not say of the Republicans in the Senate—but, rather, the goal of the Republican leadership in this body and their allies in the White House is to pave the way for the future, so that the Senate would basically be eliminated from the confirmation process. They don't want consensus, they want confrontation.

Yesterday, after rejecting our last attempt at a compromise, the majority leader issued a statement. In this statement, the majority leader said there is going to be an upcoming debate over judicial nominations, and he said he hoped the upcoming debate is free from "procedural gimmicks like the filibuster." That is a quote: "procedural gimmicks like the filibuster," "procedural gimmicks like the filibuster."

We had a freshman Senator go to the Middle East and tell the leader of Iraq that the United States was different than any other country in the world because of the filibuster—a Republican Senator. A gimmick?

The filibuster is not a procedural gimmick. The filibuster is an important check on executive power and part of every Senator's right to free speech in the Senate. ROBERT BYRD, on Thursday, from this desk right behind mine, talked about free speech.

Senator ROBERT BYRD has been in the Senate for approximately 25 percent of

the time this country has existed. I should say in the Congress—47 years in the Senate, 6 years in the House of Representatives—more than 50 years, approximately 25 percent of the time that we have been a country. He should know something about free speech. He was here on the Senate floor when the great Margaret Chase Smith, a Republican Senator from Maine, talked about the value of free speech in the Senate. He was in the Senate when the Republican Howard Baker talked about the importance of the filibuster in protecting our democracy. A gimmick? I think not.

Senator BYRD was in the Senate when the debate over civil rights took place. I heard BARACK OBAMA upstairs with the press corps say: Isn't it interesting, the filibuster was used against African Americans but they worked around it and prevailed in spite of it. They didn't move to change the rules in the middle of the game.

Senator ROBERT BYRD was here when DAN INOUE, the Medal of Honor winner from Hawaii, a new Senator, came to the floor, and as an Asian American whose friends and family were put in internment camps during the Second World War, spoke on the Senate floor about what it means to be a minority and how the filibuster should be available to protect the minority. A gimmick? I think not.

Over the years, the filibuster has proven to be an important tool of moderation and consensus, which partly explains why the Republican leadership is opposed to it. They aren't interested in moderation. They are only interested in advancing their right-wing, radical political agenda, an agenda being driven by the people who are saying we are filibustering against people of faith.

Mr. President, every day—for 23 years—with rare exception, I go to the House gym and work out. There I met Congressman RUSH HOLT. He is a nuclear scientist, a Congressman from New Jersey. RUSH's father, also named Rush Holt, served in this Chamber in the late 1930s. As a freshman United States Senator, he led a filibuster to preserve wage and hour protections for American workers. RUSH HOLT, Jr., is so proud of his father. He talked to me about the pride he had in his father being a United States Senator, and he told me this story about the filibuster his father conducted alone to preserve wage and hour protections that had come about as part of the New Deal. He wasn't using a political gimmick. He was using something that was part of the vision of our Founding Fathers, something they wanted in this body to make it unique and different—free speech. An important tool to stand up for working men and women in this country, that is what Senator Rush Holt, Sr., was using.

Of course, the filibuster has not always been used for good. I acknowledge that. Just as it has been used to bring about social change, it was also used to stall progress—I have talked about

that—things this country needed to change, such as civil rights legislation.

But Senator BARACK OBAMA speaks in favor of the filibuster. He understands, as an African American, why it is important. But at these times people have spoken and public opinion has spurred this Chamber into action, as indicated, it brings about compromise. So you see the filibuster is not a political gimmick. It is part of the fabric of this institution we call the Senate, the greatest debating society in the world—or at least it has been so far. Is that going to be taken away from us?

While I was in the gym this morning, Mr. President, I was stopped by a Republican House Member. I will not name him for fear the Republican leadership in the House will remove him from a subcommittee or whatever they do to punish people over there, and we know that happens. But everyone within the sound of my voice should know that I am telling the truth. A Republican House Member came to me this morning and said: I never thought I would say this to the Democratic leader of the Senate, but I am praying for you, that you prevail in this battle going on in the Senate. A Republican House Member is praying for me and this institution to maintain the institution as it is.

So as the moment of truth draws near, I, too, am praying, Mr. President. I do not say that lightly. I pray that cooler heads will prevail and the responsible Republicans—and they are there, I know they are there—such as this Congressman who spoke to me this morning, will join Democrats in standing up against this abuse of power, to maintain our checks and balances, to maintain the separation of powers that has made this country the power that it is, one that the world looks upon with awe, inspiration and admiration.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period for the transaction of morning business of up to 60 minutes, with the first half of the time under the control of the Democratic leader or his designee and the second half of the time under the control of the majority leader or his designee.

The Senator from Washington is recognized.

Mrs. MURRAY. I thank the Chair.

JUDICIAL NOMINATIONS

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, we awoke today to see news of a breakdown in negotiations to end the so-called nuclear confrontation that some Republicans are driving this body toward.

I want to take a minute to thank our leader, Senator REID, who I believe is really doing his best to preserve the tradition and the precedent of the Senate through good-faith negotiations. He put forth a good-faith compromise

proposal only to see it rejected out of hand. This breakdown really marks a sad day for this body.

More than 200 years ago, the Senate was created as part of the Great Compromise, and for the balance of those 200 years, compromise has been central to any and all of the great work that has been completed by the Senate. The rules are set up here to assure that the Senate serves as a center for Government compromise. We have a system of checks and balances, with the Senate checking the President through advice and consent and the President checking the Congress with the use of the veto. And all the while we have an independent judiciary that is empowered to balance out the system. Those checks and balances were put in place for a reason. They promote compromise, they promote preservation of minority rights, and they ensure that our system of government works for all of the people. Unfortunately, the goal of some becomes clearer each passing day in this body that they are not interested in compromise on the so-called nuclear option. If this Senate does remove the last check in Washington against an abuse of power, the majority will be able to appoint to lifetime seats on the Supreme Court and the Federal bench anyone they want.

The American people have rejected court packing before and I believe they will again. We are united against the abuse of power known as this nuclear option. We believe that Senators were sent here to serve all Americans, not to promote political agendas of one faction. Mr. President, Democrats will join responsible Republicans to fight this abuse of power and get back to the real work of the American people.

25TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE MOUNT ST. HELENS ERUPTION

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I rise today with my colleague from Washington State to very proudly mark the 25th anniversary of the day that Mount St. Helens erupted in my home State of Washington and will be joining with her later to offer a resolution to commemorate this anniversary.

For anyone who lived in the Pacific Northwest at the time, May 18, 1980, is a day we will never forget. It was a day that changed lives and it changed the landscape of Washington State forever. It was also a day that imposed a heavy toll in lost lives and lost habitat. Fifty-seven people were killed that day. More than 230 acres of forest were leveled in an instant.

Mr. President, the story of Mount St. Helens is a story of destruction, but it is also a story of renewal, a story of science, and a story of the importance of preparation. Today I rise to share that story and the lessons that it holds for us now 25 years later.

Perhaps the best place to start really is the day before the eruption, when Mount St. Helens was really a beautiful and striking feature of landscape