

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 President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

INFLAMED RHETORIC

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, I have sought recognition to comment about a statement made by the majority leader, Senator HARRY REID, yesterday that:

. . . President Bush, he is the man who is pulling the strings on the 49 puppets he has here in the Senate.

I have had my staff advise his staff that I intended to make some comments about that so he would be notified and could come to the floor if he chose to do so. His office is right adjacent to the floor. He is a minute or 2 away. I believe that is a very inappropriate statement.

I refer to rule XIX of the Senate rules, which provides:

. . . No Senator in debate shall, directly or indirectly, by any form of words impute to another Senator or to other Senators any conduct or motive unworthy or unbecoming a Senator.

It is my view that being called a puppet is in direct violation of that rule. I don't think there is much doubt about it. That is a term of derision, of ridicule, of censure, and it is an opprobrious term to make that statement.

I am especially concerned about it because in the immediate past there have been many Senators who have directly disagreed with the President—hardly puppets of President Bush or hardly puppets of anyone. Under our Constitution, the separation of powers makes the Congress separate from the executive branch and from the courts. That separation and that independence is something that Senators prize so very highly. So I don't take it lightly, and I don't think the other 48 of my colleagues take it lightly to be called puppets.

Let's look at the record. Within the past month, on November 8, 35 Republicans voted to override President Bush's veto of the Water Resources and Development Act. The veto was overridden; 35 disagreed with the President. It hardly sounds like there are 35 puppets there to vote to override the President's veto.

On April 11, 18 Republicans joined in support of the Stem Cell Enhancement Act of 2007. That is an issue that this Senator has worked on extensively since 1998, when stem cells first came upon the scene, and I was chairing the Appropriations Subcommittee on Health and Human Services. We have had some 20 hearings. Twice we enacted legislation to authorize the use of Federal funds for embryonic stem cell research. It doesn't sound like the 18 Senators who bucked the President's position are puppets.

On November 13, less than a month ago, 17 Republican Senators voted to support the SCHIP program, which the

President was on record as opposing. He didn't like the amount of money that was involved with children's health. On November 7, 10 Republican Senators voted in support of passage of the Labor, Health, Human Services and Education Appropriations bill, despite the President's promised veto. He did veto it.

So here you have 4 situations readily at hand, where 35, 18, 17, and 10 Republican Senators disagreed with the President. It doesn't sound like the Senators are puppets in that context.

Yesterday Senator REID also complained about the necessity to file cloture some 56 times. Well, each time cloture was filed, there is a complex story behind the cloture. On a good many of those occasions, cloture was filed and the so-called tree was filled, which precluded Senators from offering amendments. There was a time when Senators proudly said that any Senator could offer any amendment on any bill at any time. There might be some limitations postcloture on germaneness or on some rules, but a practice has developed in this body to foreclose that. The jargon is the "filling the tree," and when the tree is filled, nobody can offer an amendment.

Regrettably, that has been done by Republicans as well as Democrats. When it is hard to affix blame around here for the logjam, for our inability to get much done, you can usually divide it 50/50 between the parties. So to say Senator REID has had to file cloture on 56 occasions doesn't tell you very much.

Then the issue he took up yesterday in filing for cloture on the AMT, alternative minimum tax, Senator REID filed for cloture on the House bill, which stands very little chance of passing the Senate because it is fully offset with controversial revenue raisers. Now it is true that Senate Democrats offered to remove the offsets but to keep them in place for the tax extenders. The Republican position has been that it is illogical to use permanent tax increases to offset a temporary extension of current tax policy. So there is a good reason for what is being done here.

There is no doubt the AMT has to have a fix. If it is not done, there will be some 23 million Americans who will be taxed instead of the 3 million now. So we are all dedicated to that proposition. If you take a look at the RECORD on August 2 of this year, I offered an amendment to the small business tax relief bill to repeal the 1993 AMT rate increase.

On July 20, 2007, I voted in support of a Kyl amendment to the educational reconciliation bill, which fully repealed the AMT.

On March 23 of this year, I voted in support of a Lott amendment to the budget resolution that would have allowed for repeal of the 1993 AMT rate increase.

Again, on the same day, March 23, I voted in support of a Grassley amend-

ment to the budget resolution that would have allowed the full repeal of the AMT.

The same day, I voted in support of the Sessions amendment to the budget resolution that would have allowed families to deduct personal exemptions when calculating their AMT liability.

The RECORD is full of good-faith efforts to solve this problem. But as indicated, as stated, the course which the majority leader has taken is unsatisfactory to people on this side of the aisle. Whether it is satisfactory or unsatisfactory, it is not appropriate to call 49 Republican Senators puppets. We are trying to move through the business of the year—the people's business. We have 2½ weeks. Not a whole lot has been done. We were in on Monday; no votes. In yesterday; one non-controversial vote. We didn't come in until noon today.

I have been around here a substantial period of time and I wonder how we are going to get through all of the unfinished appropriations bills and the many other matters that are pending on the calendar. When the majority leader makes a proposal and asks for Republican assistance, many of us have been willing to listen to what he has to say. But he doesn't improve his case when he starts calling us puppets. I wonder if he is up to the job when he resorts to that kind of a statement, which only furthers the level of rancor and insults and animosity with that kind of an insulting comment.

I would be interested in the majority leader's reply, if he cares to make one. I will be near by the Senate floor.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

THE FARM BILL

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I come to the floor to talk about the negotiations on the farm bill and to ask my Republican colleagues to think very carefully—especially the farm State colleagues—about the circumstance we face with respect to the farm bill.

The majority leader made an offer to the Republican leader during the break that we would have a chance to move forward if they could do 10 amendments on their side and we can do 5 amendments on our side; that 2 of their 10 be unrelated to the farm bill, and that we have 2 additional amendments, and the bipartisan amendments that have been filed would not count against either allocation. That offer was made to Senator MCCONNELL, and Senator MCCONNELL has not yet answered or counteroffered.

I hope the Republican leader will indicate how we could proceed. If there is

a need for additional amendments—apparently, Senator HARKIN indicated it would be reasonable if there were 17 perhaps on their side and 14 on our side. Whatever the number is that would help us reach a conclusion would be very important for our being able to advance the legislation that came out of the committee, without a dissenting vote.

There are 21 Members of the Senate Agriculture Committee, Republicans and Democrats. This farm bill came out without a single dissenting vote. It is paid for, it is less costly than the President's farm proposal, and it has the beginnings of reform.

This is a reasonable offer. Certainly, Senator REID made it. If you look at previous farm bills, typically the number of recorded votes have been about 20 amendments, sometimes a bit more, sometimes a bit less. On average, there have been around 20 amendments that have actually been voted on. Senator REID's proposal would have 17 rollcall votes before final passage. So that would be a bit below the average. The leader has made clear that if there are some additional amendments that are required in order to advance this proposal, he is open to doing that.

The current farm bill expires this year. Farmers need to know and their bankers need to know what the rules of the road are going to be. So it is absolutely essential we get this legislation through the Senate and we have an opportunity to go to conference with the House to work out the differences in the early part of next year.

Let me make one final point, if I may. Some are saying just extend the current farm bill by a year or two. First of all, we know that if it is a 1-year extension, it will be 2 years because next year is an election year. Beyond that, our colleagues should know the baseline for writing a farm bill is based on the last 5 years of experience with farm legislation. That baseline is already down substantially because the last farm bill cost \$17 billion less than the estimates at the time it was written. That baseline is going to go only in one direction for the commodity provisions at least, and that is down.

So anybody who is concerned about writing a farm bill that meets the needs of the American people—not just the commodity title but nutrition, conservation, research, and all the rest—should understand this noose is going to do nothing but get tighter. It is already very tight—very tight.

I hope our colleagues on the other side bend their best efforts to come up with a response to the proposal the majority leader made to reach conclusion, and I hope they do it soon. The clock is ticking. American farm and ranch families across this country are waiting. We should not ask them to wait past Christmas. So much needs to be done, so many decisions need to be made, but Congress needs to act now.

I yield the floor.

UNANIMOUS-CONSENT REQUEST— H.R. 3074

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 3074, the Transportation-HUD, related agencies appropriations, 2008; that there be 20 minutes of debate with respect to the conference report, with the time equally divided and controlled between Senators MURRAY and BOND or their designees; that upon the use or yielding back of time, the Senate proceed to vote on adoption of the conference report, without further intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. SPECTER. Mr. President, on behalf of the Republican leadership, I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I have come to the floor today to make sure the record is clear on the difference between what is being said in Washington, DC, today and what is actually taking place.

Yesterday, President Bush took to the microphones to complain for the second day in a row that Congress was not getting its work done. For a second day in a row, he complained that Congress is not sending him appropriations bills that fund the most basic functions of Government. And for a second day in a row, our minority leader, Senator MCCONNELL, followed suit. He came out on the Senate floor and complained that Congress has not sent the appropriations bills to the President.

Let's be clear, I made a request to pass the final conference bill for the transportation-housing appropriations bill so it could be sent to President Bush. What was the result? The Republican Senators blocked it from going to the White House, and that was not the first time that happened. They blocked the transportation-housing appropriations bill from going to the White House twice before. Mr. President, 2½ weeks ago on November 15, they blocked it; 2½ weeks ago on November 16, they blocked it; and then they blocked it again today.

Let me tell you what is going on here. President Bush and the Senate Republican leadership are trying to quietly block our progress on funding the needs of the American people while loudly complaining about our failure to make progress.

I would understand the actions of the Senate Republican leadership if our transportation-housing bill was partisan or divisive, but the conference agreement we are trying to move again today has the support of every single Republican who sat on the conference committee in the House and in the Senate. That bill originally passed the Senate with 88 votes. That conference agreement has already passed the House with 270 votes.

This is not a controversial bill. It makes critical investments in some of the most urgent needs of the American people and their local communities. That bill provides \$195 million to replace the I-35W bridge that collapsed in Minnesota, an issue all of us came out on the floor and said we would move rapidly to take care of. It is sitting right here in the Senate, one step away from getting it to the President to be signed into law, and the Republican leadership said no. So they are loudly complaining about our failure to make progress.

I would understand the actions of the Senate Republican leadership if they had not taken a look at this bill and realized the critical funding in it. Besides the \$195 million for the I-35W bridge, we have \$1 billion in enhanced highway formula funding so all our States—all 50 States—can inspect and make repairs to their most deficient bridges, an issue we all agreed was important.

We have \$75 million in new housing vouchers that will shelter homeless veterans, including our struggling veterans who have returned from Iraq and Afghanistan. This is critical funding for which our communities and our veterans are waiting.

It rejects hundreds of millions of dollars in cuts that were originally proposed by the White House, cuts that would have thrown Amtrak into bankruptcy and made the congestion at our airports worse, not better.

Our bill also includes \$200 million which is urgently needed to provide housing counseling services to keep struggling mortgage holders in their homes.

I wish to take a moment to talk about that last item, the \$200 million for housing counseling. This Nation is in the middle of a housing crisis. Millions of homeowners are at risk of losing their homes in the next few quarters as interest rates on billions and billions of dollars in mortgages are being adjusted upward.

On Monday, a few days ago, the President's own Treasury Secretary, Hank Paulson, and his Housing Secretary, Alphonso Jackson, made speeches on the need for Congress to address the many steps necessary to minimize this crisis. Secretary Paulson complained at a national housing forum about the number of borrowers who were entering foreclosure without contacting either their lender or their mortgage counselor. He said:

For this public outreach campaign to be successful, there must be enough trained mortgage counselors to answer the phone when homeowners call. The administration requested funding for NeighborWorks America and other nonprofit mortgage counseling operations in its budget.

EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator's time under morning business has expired.