

where the disease occurs in our country. It was objected to. That is too bad.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

POLITICAL EXERCISES

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, what we are going to witness for the next 3 hours is the kind of thing that gives the public such a low impression of Congress. Looking at the new Gallup poll that just came out, the President has a 37-percent approval rating—certainly not anything to applaud if you are a Republican. But the Democratic Congress has a 22-percent approval rating, 15 percent below the President. Why is that? I think it is because the American public thought they sent us here to legislate. Obviously, in a body such as the Senate, in order to legislate you have to do things on a bipartisan basis. We are very different from the House of Representatives. We are actually beginning to make progress on the farm bill, although I must say we have only had one vote this entire week. It is Wednesday morning, and we have had one vote. The farm bill now is ready to move forward, and we are taking, at the insistence of the majority, 3 hours this morning to finger-point and make excuses and try to explain to the American people why we haven't been able to do enough on a bipartisan basis to achieve anything on their behalf.

It is now December 12, nearly a quarter of the way through the fiscal year. To date, we have had only one spending bill signed into law. The troops in the field haven't been funded. The Energy bill is still pending. Updates to the laws governing our terrorist surveillance program so that we can track terrorists and prevent attacks haven't been addressed.

As I indicated, we are spending 3 hours this morning engaged in what will essentially be a finger-pointing exercise instead of making further progress on the farm bill, which is poised to be completed if we will just stay on it. Christmas is less than 2 weeks away. You would think there would be a flurry of activity on the floor. You would think we would be doing everything possible so we could finish our work before New Year's Eve. But, as I indicated earlier, so far this week we have had one vote, and this is Wednesday.

Surely the majority has scheduled votes all day today; right? Wrong. We will not even consider the pending business, the farm bill, until at least this afternoon. And why do we have to wait until this afternoon? Is it so we can spend the morning addressing tax relief or the cost of gasoline or our troops and veterans? None of the above. We are gathered here this morning so the majority can spend hours of

valuable floor time trying to score political points instead of trying to make law.

As I indicated earlier, they have set aside 3 hours to try to show that this session's very limited accomplishments haven't been their fault, that the endless investigations and midnight Iraq votes were not the cause. They have set aside this time as if magically in the next 3 hours they will somehow pass the litany of things they have not been able to accomplish over the past 3 months.

Let's not waste even more time re-learning the lessons of the past. Partisanship and refusal to work with the minority may get you a headline, but it won't get bills signed into law. If you are serious about accomplishments, let's get back to work. Let's work together so that instead of pointing fingers, this Congress can actually point to some accomplishments. It is December 12. There is simply no time for political exercises on the Senate floor. We simply don't have the luxury of putting off our fundamental responsibilities any longer.

If the majority is serious about finishing our work and not merely about making a political point, they will not object to the following unanimous consent request which I will now make.

I ask unanimous consent that we return to the pending business of the farm bill in order to make further progress on this important measure.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

Mr. DURBIN. I object.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Objection is heard.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, there will be a period of morning business for 3 hours, with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees and with Senators permitted to speak up to 10 minutes each, with the majority controlling the first half and Republicans controlling the final half.

The assistant majority leader.

OBSTRUCTION BY FILIBUSTER

Mr. DURBIN. Isn't this perfect? The minority leader on the Republican side comes to the floor, lamenting the fact that we aren't moving to the farm bill immediately. I think there is something in the water in the U.S. Capitol that leads to political amnesia. The Senator from Kentucky has obviously forgotten that we sat on the floor and languished for more than 2 weeks because the Republicans presented us

with 200 amendments to the farm bill and wouldn't narrow them down to a reasonable number we could consider. We sat here for 2 straight weeks and did nothing. Now the Senator from Kentucky has great angst over the thought that we might even talk about anything else before we return to the farm bill at noon.

Trust me, we will return at noon. We should have finished it weeks ago. We could have finished it weeks ago if the Senator from Kentucky had gathered his Republican conference together and said: Please, once every 5 years we consider a farm bill. We don't consider amendments of everything under the sun—the Tax Code, medical malpractice. We focus on the farm bill, on nutrition and rural development and agricultural programs. If he had done that, if he had gathered his Republicans together and asked for a modicum of cooperation, we would have finished the farm bill weeks ago.

Now he comes to the Senate floor with a heavy heart that we might spend the next 2½ hours talking about something other than the farm bill. He has forgotten, obviously, what has transpired. But the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD tells the story. The record is there for America to see.

This Republican minority has taken us to a new place in the Senate. They have broken a record. I don't think another Congress will be able to match what they have been able to do, at least I hope not. There is something in the Senate called a filibuster. A filibuster is a time-honored tradition where an individual Senator can virtually stop debate on a measure by standing and speaking. Most people are familiar with it because of the popular movie of 50 or 60 years ago, "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington." Jimmy Stewart stood at his desk, this brandnew Senator, fighting against the odds and against the establishment until he crumbled in exhaustion. His filibuster ended as he was physically spent. That was an image emblazoned on the minds of many across America of a Senate where one person can stand and fight to the bitter end.

There is some truth to that movie. In a filibuster, any Senator can take the floor on an amendable measure and hold the floor as long as they are physically able to do so. The record may be held by Senator Thurmond of South Carolina. If I am not mistaken, he spent some 24 hours once in the midst of one of these filibusters.

I remember reading an account, incidentally. The first man I ever worked for in the Senate was a Senator from Illinois named Paul Douglas. They knew Strom Thurmond was going to initiate this filibuster. They also knew they might be able to end the filibuster early if he had to take a break for a trip to the restroom. They knew Senator Thurmond was partial to orange juice, and they brought a pitcher of orange juice on the Senate floor next to his desk, hoping he would drink it and

it would end the filibuster. It did not work. He went on for 24 hours.

You can do it, and the only way to stop it is to file a motion to close off that debate called a cloture motion. So in the history of the Senate, the record is, in the course of 2 years, 61 filibusters—roughly 30 filibusters a year. That is the record. Rarely have we reached that number—until this year. The Republican minority has now broken the all-time record for filibusters in the Senate. I believe the number is 58—58—filibusters. So 58 times they have stopped the Senate, sometimes for the required 30 hours, but sometimes for weeks at a time. They have taken the role of the Senate—a deliberative body—and turned it into an obstacle course where they toss filibusters in front of every suggestion we make.

Well, I respect this place. I respect this institution. I am honored to serve here. But I think the Republican minority has abused the tradition of the Senate. Fifty-eight filibusters in 1 year—and we are not even finished. This is an indication of their fear—their fear of change, their fear of new legislation, their fear that perhaps we would put together a bipartisan answer to some of the challenges facing America, their fear we will write a record of accomplishment that they failed to write when they were in charge. That is what drives this—fear, fear of the future, fear of change. They are a party without an identity. It is the party of the past using the tactics of the past, and America can see it.

I listened to Senator REID of Nevada, our majority leader. He came to the Senate floor to talk about one piece of legislation which he asked to bring up for a vote. It is not a radical idea. It is not a big government program. It is not an increase in taxes or anything like it. Simply put, it is a registry for those afflicted with ALS, Lou Gehrig's disease, in the hopes that gathering that information about the victims—where they live, how old they are, and their circumstances—will help us not only provide medication for them but learn about this disease.

Can you think of anything more bipartisan than that? The first victim I ever personally saw with Lou Gehrig's disease was a man who served in this Chamber. He was a man who was a Senator from the State of New York. I mentioned Paul Douglas earlier, who I thought was one of the best who ever served in our State. I once asked him, as a college student: Who were the greatest U.S. Senators?

He said: I think Wayne Morse is one of the greatest. And he said: Of course, Jacob Javits—a Republican Senator from New York, who was honored and respected by my mentor and hero, Paul Douglas, a Democrat from Illinois.

Well, when I came to the House of Representatives, Jacob Javits had retired and was a victim of ALS. I would see him in this heroic role, coming to Washington, lobbying Members of the House and the Senate for research

funds on Lou Gehrig's disease. He was in a wheelchair. He had lost the use of his arms and legs but for just a minor amount of function he had in one hand, and he was on a respirator. He was moving around in a motorized wheelchair, on a respirator, begging for funds for research for Lou Gehrig's disease.

How could you ever forget that image? I cannot.

I think of my neighbor in Springfield, IL, Mary Winning. She lives a block away. Her husband Jim was my law partner for years. Mary came to me one day half in anger and half in tears over a diagnosis in her family of ALS and the fact that she did not think our Government was doing enough for research on Lou Gehrig's disease. I know how much it meant to her and her family.

I think of going through the Springfield airport last year and seeing a young man who had been a volunteer in one of my early campaigns. I said hello to him. He was not there the next week, and I asked what happened. He said, well, he had to quit. He has a history of Lou Gehrig's disease in his family, and he has been diagnosed. Senator REID said he has, perhaps, 18 months to live.

So Senator REID comes to the floor and asks the Republicans to take off the hold on the bill for Lou Gehrig's disease. He asked them to stop the obstruction, to give the bill a chance—not to just guarantee it is going to pass. He would have accepted a rollcall, I am sure. Just give us a chance to bring that up on the Senate floor. How much time would it take? Thirty minutes? Of course, there was an objection. The Senator from Texas, Mr. CORNYN, objected to bringing up the bill on the Lou Gehrig's disease registry in America—objected to bringing up the bill. His reason? He will not let us bring up that bill until we are prepared—

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator's time has expired.

Mr. DURBIN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to extend my remarks under morning business for an additional 10 minutes.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Is there objection?

The Chair hears none, and it is so ordered.

Mr. DURBIN. He, of course, wants us to only allow a registry for Lou Gehrig's patients if we will allow a debate on providing \$50 billion, \$60 billion, \$70 billion more for the war in Iraq—not paid for—and that it happen immediately, even though we have been told by the military they have enough funds to continue this war until at least the end of February, the first of March.

Well, that is the price we would have to pay under the Republican agenda to bring up a bill for the Lou Gehrig's registry. That is sad, and it shows you the extremes they will go to to stop even the most benign and bipartisan bill we can think of.

VETERANS TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY AND HEALTH PROGRAMS IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 2007 AND VETERANS' BENEFITS ENHANCEMENT ACT OF 2007

Mr. DURBIN. Last month, Mr. President, I came to the floor and asked unanimous consent for two bills from the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee—I did not ask that the bills be passed, only that they be brought to the floor and considered. I talked to Senator REID of Nevada about this and wanted to give Senator REID the option to determine the amount of time in the debate, in consultation with the Republican minority.

At that time, just as this morning, a Republican Senator—in that case, Senator LARRY CRAIG of Idaho—objected. Why? Well, they objected because they did not want us to move to issues involving America's veterans. I think our veterans deserve to have legislation such as the bills I have asked to be considered.

The first of the two bills is the Veterans Traumatic Brain Injury and Health Programs Improvement Act of 2007. That bill would allow 1.3 million middle-income veterans to enroll for VA health care and increase the VA's beneficiary travel reimbursement rate—the first time that travel reimbursement rate would be increased in 30 years—to help veterans living in rural and remote areas.

There are programs, as well, for the treatment of veterans with traumatic brain injuries, the signature injury of the Iraq war.

Finally, the bill provides aid for homeless veterans, which is especially important at a time when one out of four homeless people you see on the streets in America are veterans.

I asked that this bill be brought up, that we agree on a time limit, consider it, and pass it.

Do you know how many speeches have been given on the floor of the Senate by Members on both sides of the aisle about our devotion to our soldiers, our men and women in uniform? Do you know how many speeches have been given on this floor on both sides of the aisle about how much we care and owe to our veterans? I am sure you could fill many CONGRESSIONAL RECORDS.

So if this job is about more than just speeches and is about doing something to actually help our veterans, how could the Republicans continue to object? Object to helping veterans make it to the VA clinics and hospitals? Object to finding ways to eliminate homelessness among veterans? Object to the idea of expanding medical care for veterans who are the victims of traumatic brain injury?

If you want to vote against it, so be it. But to not even let us bring the bill to the floor for consideration? They did.

The second bill is the Veterans' Benefits Enhancement Act. This comprehensive legislation would improve