

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Cecilia Elena Rouse, of California, to be a Member of the Council of Economic Advisers.

Harry Reid, Christopher J. Dodd, Patrick J. Leahy, Sherrod Brown, Byron L. Dorgan, Jack Reed, Jeff Merkley, Michael F. Bennet, Charles E. Schumer, Amy Klobuchar, Richard Durbin, Patty Murray, John F. Kerry, Sheldon Whitehouse, Ben Nelson, Jeff Bingaman, Herb Kohl.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum be waived.

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

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I now move that the Senate return to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, the motion is agreed to.

Mr. REID. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. DURBIN. I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak for up to 10 minutes each.

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

PRESIDENTIAL PROBLEM SOLVING

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, in the midst of much talk about bipartisanship and not much to show for it, I have a nomination for an issue upon which we can work together, and that is this: review the maze of conflicting forms, FBI investigations, IRS audits, ethics requirements, and financial disclosures to make it possible for President Obama and future Presidents to put together promptly a team to help them solve big problems.

This is an urgent problem today because during the worst banking crisis since the Great Depression, the man in charge of fixing the crisis, Treasury Secretary Timothy Geithner, apparently is sitting in his office without much help, at least from any Obama Presidential appointees.

According to news accounts, among the key vacant positions at the Treasury Department are the Assistant Secretary for Tax Policy; the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Tax Policy; the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Tax

Analysis; the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Tax, Trade, and Tariff Policy; and the Deputy Assistant Secretary for International Tax Affairs. The first choice for Deputy Secretary of the Treasury appears to have withdrawn her name from consideration.

Four months after the President's election, according to TheBigMoney.com, the list of vacancies on the Treasury Department Web site shows that "Main Treasury Building is a lonely place, conjuring up visions of Geithner signing dollar bills one by one . . . , watering the plants, and answering the phones when he's not crafting a bank rescue plan."

Of course, there are the career employees available and at least one hold-over Assistant Secretary and various czars in the White House—but even one of the czars has expressed concern about the slow pace of filling Treasury Department jobs at a critical time.

Part of the problem may be attributed to the Treasury Secretary's boss, our impressive new President, who is nevertheless subject to the criticism that he is living over the store but not minding it.

Presidents have many problems to solve, but no one ever suggested that the wisest course is to try to solve them all at once. There is a tradition that Washington, DC, can only do one thing well at a time. And Presidents are supposed to exclude from the White House the merely important issues so they may deal with the truly Presidential problems, which surely must not include being distracted by debates with radio talk show hosts.

President Eisenhower, who knew something about leading complex organizations, said in 1952: "I will go to Korea." The country relaxed and elected him, confident that the general would end the Korean war.

We need for President Obama to say in Eisenhower fashion "I will fix the banks"—and then stay home long enough to do it. Then the country might relax a little and gain some confidence that this might actually happen, which is the first step and perhaps the main step in economic recovery.

But the President needs a team at Treasury to help persuade the American people that he can and will get the job done.

The President has brought on himself some of the difficulty of putting together a team. In addition to having too many balls in the air at once, in my opinion, his standards for hiring sometimes seem to have the effect of disqualifying people who know something about the problem from being hired to solve the problem.

But another part of the President's difficulty in filling jobs—one that has afflicted every President since Watergate—is the maze of investigations and forms that prospective senior officials must complete and the risk they run that they will be trapped and humiliated and disqualified by an unintentional and relatively harmless mistake.

I voted against the nomination of Secretary Geithner because I thought it was a bad example for the man in charge of collecting the taxes not to have paid them. And I thought his excuse for not paying was not plausible. But that does not mean that we should disqualify every Presidential nominee for minor tax discrepancies that result from the complexity of our Byzantine Tax Code, a Tax Code which has reached 3.7 million words, according to a January report by the National Taxpayer Advocate, and which is badly in need of reform.

I suspect very few Americans with complex tax returns can go through a multiple-year audit without finding something with which the IRS might disagree.

Take the case of former Dallas mayor Ron Kirk, President Obama's nominee to be U.S. Trade Representative, who headlines report paid back taxes primarily because he failed to list as income—and then take a charitable deduction on—speaking fees that he gave away to charity. Common sense suggests, and his tax preparer thought, what Mr. Kirk did was appropriate. After all, he did not keep the money. The IRS apparently has a more convoluted rule for dealing with such things. In any event, the matter is so trivial as to be irrelevant to his suitability to be the trade nominee.

Tax audits are only the beginning. There is the FBI full field investigation during which friends of the nominee are asked such questions as: Does he live beyond his means?

When I was nominated for Education Secretary a few years ago, one of my friends replied to the FBI agent: Don't we all?

There are Federal financial disclosures. Then there is the White House questionnaire, and, of course, the questions from the confirming Senate committee. The definition of what constitutes "income" on some forms is different than the definition of "income" on others. It is easy to make a mistake.

This is not as bad as it could be. We have a Democratic President and a Democratic Congress with big majorities in both Chambers. So the nominees have gone through fairly quickly. But when the Congress is of a different party than the President, the congressional questionnaires expand and sometimes delay the nomination for more weeks.

Washington, DC, has become the only place where you hire a lawyer, an accountant, and an ethics officer before you find a house and put your kid in school.

The motto around here has become: "Innocent until nominated."

Every legal counsel to every President since Nixon would, I suspect, agree that in the name of effective government, this process needs to be changed. Most have tried to change it, but in Washington style, new regulations pile up on top of old ones, creating a more bewildering maze.

So I have this suggestion—and one of the Senators to whom I want to make the suggestion is here today, the Senator from Connecticut. I suggest Senator LIEBERMAN and Senator COLLINS, who are the chairman and ranking member of the committee with jurisdiction over this mess and who have a tradition of working well together, should set as a goal to clean it up by the end of the year. Invite all the former White House counsels of both parties to give their opinions. Consolidate and simplify the forms so we learn only what we need to know.

To help with this, I suggest that Senators LIEBERMAN and COLLINS form one of those “gangs” that we occasionally form in the Senate, maybe a dozen or more Senators equally divided among both parties—some from the Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee and some not—in order to limit the possibility that everyone will run away from the final recommendations because they fear someone might think Senators are not interested in ethical and good government.

Good government right now means fixing the banks and having the best possible team to do it. As a Washington Post editorial writer said yesterday of the President:

As he convened his “health care summit” at the White House . . . the stock market was hitting another 12-year low, General Motors was again teetering on the brink of insolvency and the country was still waiting to hear the details of the Treasury’s proposal to bail out banks.

Maybe we can make this grand bargain with our new President: If you will keep your eye on the ball—in this case, fixing the banks so the economy will get moving again—we will work in a bipartisan way to make it easier for you and for future Presidents to promptly assemble a team and govern us properly.

PRESIDENT OBAMA’S STEM CELL EXECUTIVE ORDER

Mr. DODD. Mr. President, I wish to highlight the Executive order signed today by President Obama that will bring hope to millions of patients and their loved ones and relief to scientists and researchers throughout the country.

With this Executive order, President Obama has overturned the harmful restrictions on scientific discovery established by President Bush and his administration. And with his Presidential memorandum, President Obama has set our country on a path where science, not politics or ideology, will guide public policy and Government decision-making.

Today’s Executive order will help our Nation’s scientists perform promising stem cell research that may one day provide relief to the more than 100 million Americans suffering from Parkinson’s, diabetes, spinal cord injury, ALS, cancer, and many other devastating conditions for which there is still no cure.

Several of my Senate colleagues, led by Senators HARKIN, SPECTER, KENNEDY, HATCH and FEINSTEIN, and I, tried to allow embryonic stem cell research to go forward with the passage of the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act in both the Senate and the House, but these efforts were consistently blocked by President Bush’s veto.

I am joining my colleagues again on this legislation because we need to codify the protection of embryonic stem cell research in order to guard against the possibility that a future President might seek to undo the tremendous step taken today by President Obama.

In my own State of Connecticut, we lost a great pioneer in the global effort for stem cell research last month with the untimely death of Dr. Xiangzhong “Jerry” Yang. Since he came to the United States from China, Dr. Yang devoted his life’s work to furthering science and working toward curing deadly and debilitating diseases.

Dr. Yang was a brilliant and precocious reproductive biologist at the University of Connecticut who conducted some of the world’s leading work in the 1990’s to refine the cloning of cows and bulls through the use of adult cells in order to improve the efficiency of cloning technology and improve the availability of cloned cattle for size and weight, high milk production, and other favorable genetic traits. Dr. Yang collaborated with Japanese scientists in 1998 to clone a prize bull with cells scratched from the animal’s ear.

While at the University of Connecticut, Dr. Yang organized researchers to help found the university’s Center for Regenerative Biology in 2001. As the center’s director, Dr. Yang continued his work toward producing tissue to be used in heart surgery, organ replacement, and other medical procedures.

He was a leading force behind the Connecticut State Stem Cell Research Program which was signed into law in 2005. This \$100 million initiative to support stem cell research earned Connecticut the moniker “Stem Cell Central” by the New York Times. Dr. Yang will be missed, but with today’s announcement by President Obama, the fruits of his persistence will inform generations of stem cell scientists to come who will now be able to conduct their work without the arbitrary restrictions put in place by President Bush.

Today is a momentous day for patients and their loved ones as well as researchers and scientists throughout the country. To the thousands of parents in the State of Connecticut whose children live every day with juvenile diabetes or who watched and suffered as their loved one succumbed to ALS, cancer, or Parkinson’s disease, today’s announcement can’t bring that loved one back or immediately provide a cure to their disease but it will mean that future generations of Americans may not have to suffer as they did. To-

day’s announcement brings hope that not only can future discoveries be possible, but they are possible right here in the United States.

I applaud the President for his actions today in support of science and hope. And I congratulate the many advocates and researchers in Connecticut and around the country for their persistence in making this hard-fought victory for science a reality.

ALHURRA TELEVISION

Mr. KAUFMAN. Mr. President, I rise to call my colleagues attention to a promising development for U.S. public diplomacy efforts in the Middle East. Yesterday, Alhurra Television, the U.S. Government-sponsored Arabic language channel, launched a new groundbreaking live television show originating simultaneously from five countries and three continents including Dubai, Beirut, Cairo, Jerusalem and Alhurra’s headquarters in Springfield, Va. The 3-hour daily program titled *Al Youm* (Today in Arabic), provides viewers a window to the world through its coverage of the latest news from the Middle East, the United States, and the world. The show also includes topics such as health, sports technology, entertainment news, and social and cultural issues. *Al Youm* includes interviews with everyone from politicians to athletes, leaders in business, and the arts.

On its opening broadcast, *Al Youm* carried an interview with House International Relations Committee Chairman Howard Berman and included a report from Alhurra’s White House correspondent discussing the Obama administration’s outreach to a moderate faction of the Taliban. Since its launch coincided with International Women’s Day, *Al Youm* had a series of reports on the role of women in the Middle East, including a story on young girls being forced into marriage and a live interview with the Executive Director of Dubai’s Social Development Institute. There was also a profile of the former First Lady of Lebanon and her work as the founder of a health center for children with blood diseases. *Al Youm* had the latest financial and sports news, as well as a health segment on the growing problem of obesity.

Al Youm’s entertainment segments featured well-known singers and performers in the region. Popular Arab singer Myriam Fares introduced her latest song that has not been released to the public. Hisham Abbas, another famous Arab singer, joined *Al Youm* during its debut and sang his most popular hit song, *Feno*. Actress Nadine Al Rassi appeared live to discuss her program, *Assr El Harim*, one of the most popular television programs in the Middle East. *Al Youm* also profiled the first Arab singer to represent Israel in the Eurovision Festival.

Al Youm further enhances the strong core of program options already offered