

Great Compromise in 1787 in Philadelphia, has allowed people to work together. Even though the State of Kentucky has more people than the State of Nevada and the State of California has more people than the State of Nevada, the State of Nevada has as much power in the Senate as Kentucky and California.

I have confidence we can work together. I am convinced that Senator MCCONNELL and I—our critics and the press can call us a lot of names and make suggestions, but one thing they cannot say about us is we are not experienced. We have been through a lot of political wars. We are ready to take on whatever wars face us.

I say to my friend, Senator MCCONNELL, I have every confidence we will be able to move this country forward.

We need to have the 111th Congress a tremendous success, and we can do that. In the coming days, my fellow Democrats and I will introduce our priorities for this Congress. It happens every Congress. My colleagues on the other side of the aisle will introduce their legislative priorities. We look forward to developing dialog between the two sides of the aisle to see if we can meet somewhere in the middle.

This day marks not just the 150th year of this Chamber but also the 50th year of the service of Senator ROBERT BYRD of West Virginia. For 50 years he has been a Senator, but he has been a Member of Congress for 56 years because he served in the House before he came here. It is no secret, when it comes to reverence for the Senate, we have all learned a lot—I have learned a lot—from President BYRD's love of this body. I also have learned a lot from Senator BYRD of his desire for all Americans to appreciate that little document we call our Constitution. So on this the 50th anniversary of Senator BYRD's service, I express publicly my affection and admiration for this good man and wish him well in this Congress.

For our nine new Members sworn today and for all Americans, I offer a few of Senator BYRD's words which he delivered to a meeting of new Senators about 12 years ago, when he said:

After 200 years, [the Senate] is still the anchor of the Republic, the morning and evening star in the American constitutional constellation.

It has weathered the storms of adversity, withstood the barbs of cynics and attacks of critics. It has provided stability and strength for the nation during periods of civil strife and uncertainty, panics and depressions.

In war and peace, it has been the sure refuge and protector of the rights of states and of a political minority. And, today, the Senate still stands—the great forum of constitutional American liberty.

So said Senator BYRD 12 years ago.

Today is a new chapter in history. It begins today. Each of us has the honor of taking part in it in some way. We here in the Senate have the ability to help write that history.

As the work starts, the words of Daniel Webster return to mind: "Be it

known that on this day the Union of the United States of America stands firm." I believe that.

I have just a few other brief remarks.

As my colleagues are aware, two Democratic U.S. Senate seats—one from Illinois and the other from Minnesota—are currently vacant. I will briefly address these two unusual circumstances because of the inquiries we have all had.

First, the Illinois seat left vacant by President-elect Barack Obama. Although I do not know Mr. Burris personally—I hope to meet him in the next few days—he has served the State of Illinois in elective office over many years. Mr. Burris and his advisers were welcomed to the Capitol this morning by Sergeant at Arms Terry Gainer, who was chief of police in Chicago, so they have known each other for a long time. They then had a gracious meeting with the Secretary of the Senate, Nancy Erickson, and Senate Parliamentarian Alan Frumin, who informed them that Mr. Burris is not in possession of the necessary credentials from the State of Illinois. A court case in Illinois is pending to determine whether Secretary of State Jesse White is obligated to sign this certification. We are awaiting that court decision. If Mr. Burris takes possession of valid credentials, the Senate will proceed in a manner that is respectful to Mr. Burris while ensuring there is no cloud of doubt over the appointment to fill this seat.

I also understand that Mr. Burris will likely give testimony to the Illinois State Assembly impeachment proceedings in the next few days, these proceedings pending against Governor Blagojevich. We await that proceeding as Senators as well.

As to Minnesota, I know a little bit about close elections. I am only going to talk about two of them because I have had a number of them. I lost one by 524 votes. It was a statewide election for the Senate. That was traumatic, to lose that race to Paul Laxalt, one of the historic Senators from Nevada—but of course for this country because of his very close personal relationship with President Reagan. Paul Laxalt and I are close personal friends, but I lost that vote by 524. We went through a recount. I didn't file any lawsuits. There were no challenges. As hard as it was—and it was hard because that is really the first thing I had ever lost—I lost the race. All over the country, Democrats were winning these Senate seats and I lost in Nevada, but I had to give up because I had no chance of winning.

I won the second by 428 votes. One reason JOHN ENSIGN and I are soulmates is because our politics are so different, but our friendship is as good as it gets. That was a tough election, a bitter election that JOHN ENSIGN and I went through. We had a recount in Nevada that was ongoing. JOHN ENSIGN made a decision that it was a waste of time; I can't win the election. Before the recount was completed, JOHN EN-

SIGN called me—I was having dinner with my wife—and said: You are going to be the next Senator. I thought when he made that phone call, gee, this is some kind of good guy. I didn't handle my loss nearly as well as he did. I remember that.

Anyway, JOHN ENSIGN filed no challenges, didn't complete the recount, there were no lawsuits. And JOHN ENSIGN is now a Member of the Senate. I am fortunate to have a number of good friends, but, boy, he is a friend, and I think if you ask him he would say the same.

So I say to my friend Norm Coleman, watch what I have said and watch what has taken place in the past. The Senate race in Minnesota was very close. It was very, very close—one of the closest in history. The bipartisan State Canvassing Board and Minnesota's election officials have done an exemplary job in handling the recount. There were no allegations of partisanship or unfairness from either side that I am aware of, and I followed it every day for 6 weeks.

Even close elections, though, have winners. I can testify to that. After all votes have been fairly counted, Al Franken is certified as the winner by the State Canvassing Board, and he is the Senator-elect from Minnesota. Democrats will not seek to seat Senator-elect Franken today. We understand the sensitivity on both sides to an election this close.

This is a difficult time for former Senator Coleman and his family. I acknowledge that. He is entitled to the opportunity to proceed however he feels appropriate. But for someone who has been in the trenches on a number of these elections, graciously conceding, as his friend JOHN ENSIGN did, would be the right step. This can't drag on forever, and I understand that. I hope former Senator Coleman and all our Republican colleagues will choose to respect the will of the people of Minnesota. They have chosen a new Senator, Al Franken, and his term must begin and will begin soon.

I repeat, I look forward to this year, hoping that next year at this time we will be here talking about many things we have been able to accomplish.

As I have said on this floor, if we accomplish things, there is credit to go around to everyone. If we do not accomplish anything, there is blame to go around to everyone. That is not where I want to be.

EXECUTIVE COMMUNICATION

The Presiding Officer laid before the Senate the following communication:

A communication from the Director of the Federal Register, National Archives, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the Certificates of Ascertainment of the electors of the President and Vice President of the United States.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. 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 remarks of Mr. LIEBERMAN, pertaining to the introduction of S. 160, are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

TRIBUTE TO CLAIBORNE PELL

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, on January 1, Claiborne Pell died. Claiborne Pell was a Senator from Rhode Island, the longest serving Senator from that State, a Senator whose name is known by most college students and by most people who care about education in America because he was largely responsible for helping to create in 1973 what we now call the Pell grant, a Federal scholarship that follows students to the college of their choice. It was originally called the Basic Educational Opportunity Grant, but Pell grant is a lot easier to say. It is a remarkable success in our country. He deserves to be remembered for that success.

I knew him as a staff member when I came here with Senator Howard Baker, who was here just a few hours ago as we were sworn in. That was 42 years ago. I knew him as Education Secretary in 1991 and 1992.

The American higher education system is, at a time when we worry about some of our institutions, one of our great secret weapons in America, one of our great strengths. One reason for that is because of Federal grants and loans.

It all started not with the Pell grant but just at the end of World War II with the GI bill for veterans. It was a college scholarship. Actually, it was an educational scholarship the veterans could spend wherever they wished, and the "wherever they wished" point is the important point because many of those men and some women who came back from World War II used their GI bill money to go to high school. Some used it to go to college in other countries of the world.

No one said you can't go to the University of Delaware or you must go to Notre Dame or you can't go to Brown University or you can't go to a Historically Black College. The GI bill for veterans followed the student to the college of that student's choice.

It was not universally popular. The president of the University of Chicago,

Mr. Hutchins, said at the time that it would create a campus full of hobos because college at that time was for a very limited number of Americans.

At the end of World War II, only 5 percent of Americans 25 and older had completed at least 4 years of college. But today, according to the most recent figures, that figure is six times that. Nearly 30 percent of Americans have completed 4 years of college.

First, the GI bill after World War II, then the Pell grant in 1973, then the various loans the Federal Government allows for students. So today, 60 percent of the men and women who go to American colleges and universities have a Federal grant or Federal loan to help them pay for college.

It is never easy to afford college. The average tuition at a 4-year private school is about \$25,000 today, and you add to that your living expenses. It is important to remember that an average tuition at a 4-year public university is about \$6,500, and the average tuition and fees for community colleges is \$2,400.

So Senator Pell, by his leadership and his work as chairman of the Education Subcommittee of our Health, Education, and Labor Committee, helped add to the legacy of the GI bill for veterans and helped make it possible for so many Americans to go to college.

I wish to conclude my remarks and honor Senator Pell with a thought about our future. I have always wondered why if the Pell grant was such a good idea for colleges, why don't we try it for kindergarten through the 12th grade.

We seem to overlook the fact that American students can choose their college and the money follows the student to the college. It might be Nashville Auto Diesel College. It might be Harvard University. But we don't give the money to the school, we give it to the student to decide where to go. That was a happy accident that happened with the GI bill, and it was a happy accident that happened in 1973.

I remember saying to one distinguished Member of this body: You know, the Pell grant is a voucher.

This Senator recoiled from that and said: I am opposed to vouchers.

I said: But you are not opposed to the Pell grant, are you?

And she said: Well, no, that is different.

I would argue that is not different at all. What we have done in kindergarten to 12th grade is give the money directly to institutions, and we, in that sense, create local educational monopolies and limit the amount of competition in choice.

We can look at our experience with higher education and see how it is generally considered to be by far the best in the world. We not only have the best colleges and universities in the world, we have almost all of them. Then we look at our system of kindergarten through the 12th grade.

The Presiding Officer has been Governor of his State. He worked hard on charter schools. We have all tried many different ideas to try to improve kindergarten through 12th grade, but we have never quite seemed to be able to make it as effective as our success with higher education.

That is why in 2004 I suggested on the Senate floor that we try the idea of a Pell grant for kids. I ask unanimous consent to have printed in the RECORD following my remarks the remarks I made on the Senate floor on May 17, 2004, about Pell grants for kids.

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

(See Exhibit 1.)

Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, to summarize them, they were simply this: Why not look to the example of our higher education system and try it with kindergarten through the 12th grade? The Pell grants for kids I proposed was to give every single child from a middle- or low-income family a \$500 scholarship that would follow them to the school or other accredited academic program of their choice. These would be new Federal dollars so no district would see its share of money from Washington cut, and it would give less wealthy families many of the same choices that families with money already have.

As one example, across our country we see art and music lessons cut in schools. As budgets get tight, they are the first things that are cut. The kids who go to the schools from the areas that have less money from property taxes and less money from sales taxes are not able to have the art and music courses. If they had a \$500 Pell grant for kids, they might take it to an after-school program for art or afterschool program for music, or the parents might get together and go to the school the children attend and say: Look, there are 20 of us with these \$500 Pell grants. We will all come here if you hire an art teacher part time or a music teacher part time. It would give parents some consumer power, it would give children opportunities, and it would give schools with less money more money.

This is an idea I hope we can seriously consider as we look ahead to the future of American public education. We should recognize that there are a great many school districts with children who have less money and less of a tax base than others and that we have had a wonderful example with the GI bill for veterans and with Pell grants in colleges and universities.

So why not try it in a limited way to see if it would help improve opportunity and education in kindergarten through the 12th grade as it has in college.

My main purpose today is to honor Claiborne Pell. He served 36 years with distinction. He contributed greatly to the opportunities of education in America. He did it with dignity, and he did it with intelligence. We respect