

Gene made countless investments in his local community, including decades of public service, with 12 years as the mayor of the community in the city of Burlington and another 12 years as a county commissioner for the County of Coffey.

To many, he is known as the “Downtown Guy,” a nickname he earned over decades of restoring and revitalizing downtown Burlington. Throughout more than 40 years in the community, Gene Merry restored 26 homes, cleaned up more than 100 lots, and restored 28 downtown buildings. Those of us who come from small towns and rural areas know the importance of somebody who is going to take the lead in trying to make our community look better and to be better and to create opportunities for those buildings—those homes for people to live in and those businesses for people to commence a business and to succeed.

Gene and his wife of more than 40 years, Barbara, raised two children—Emilee and Bobby—in Burlington. Sadly, in 2023, Gene lost his wife Barbara to cancer. He remarried to Linda Hunsicker, on December 14, 2024, and they are now relocating to Salina to be near her family.

Although Gene is leaving Burlington, the community will not forget him. His legacy will live on in the hearts and minds of those whom he touched and in the streets and byways of the town in which he invested. If I had to guess, Gene will be a constant visitor back to Burlington.

When asked what he will miss most about Burlington, Gene responded, “This is a very friendly community. I’ll miss walking downtown and talking to people.”

Gene loved Burlington, but he also loved Kansas. And between 1997 and 2010, he fulfilled a personal goal of driving all of Kansas’s more than 10,000 miles of highway, both paved and dirt and gravel. He has driven a lot of roads across Kansas, and I hope he hasn’t exceeded me in the amount of time and effort and places he has been across our State. But he loved Kansas, and he demonstrated he wanted to see the geography; he wanted to see the view; and he wanted to say hello and shake hands with the people.

As part of something called the Kansas Sampler Foundation project, Gene has visited all eight wonders of our State, from the Cosmosphere in Hutchinson to the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum in Abilene, to Monument Rock in Gove County. He knows firsthand our rich history and natural beauty, and he also knows the hearts of the people who live there.

No one could say it better than he did when he said, “Kansas has the greatest people—and Burlington is a great place to call home.”

So thank you, Gene, for investing in a cause bigger than yourself and for leaving behind a legacy of service and devotion to the community you love and to the State that you live in and

admire. You have been a role model. In the articles I have read about people praising you, what they said is you caused them to decide they wanted to do something. And isn’t that one of the greatest compliments and one of the most necessary components of the way we live our lives? When you can convince somebody else that they, too, ought to volunteer and make a difference, you are really special.

So, Mr. President, I use this opportunity to thank Gene Merry for his tremendous contribution to the city of Burlington and to the people of the State of Kansas.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arkansas.

NOMINATIONS

Mr. COTTON. Mr. President, it is 2:20 on Saturday afternoon, not a usual time for the Senate to be in business, especially leading into the August State work period when Senators are home meeting with their constituents, hearing their concerns, sharing news about what was worked on. So you can say it is unusual, for sure, that we are here.

I want to take a brief trip down memory lane to explain why we are here for the benefit of Senators, especially Senators who haven’t been here until recently, and for the benefit of our friends who are visiting in the Gallery.

We are here for one reason. We are here because of the actions of one man: CHUCK SCHUMER, the Democratic leader. We are here voting, as you have probably seen and wondered about, on a series of nominees. These are not household names. For some of you, you may not even have known the job existed. No offense. I am sure it is important to them and their parents.

But for over 200 years, these kind of nominees didn’t get a vote on a procedural question and then 2 hours of debate and then another vote on confirmation; they were voice-voted or they were adopted by what is called unanimous consent of the Senate—for over 200 years.

You can see the evidence here in front of me on this chart. This is the percentage of civilian nominees who have been confirmed by voice vote or by unanimous consent going back to George Bush 41 and to the day of President Trump’s second term, through about the first 6 months of the administration.

George Bush 41: 98 percent. Bill Clinton. Some people thought Bill Clinton’s Presidency started at a more polarized time of politics. Nope. Ninety-eight percent for Bill Clinton as well. George W. Bush, Bush 43: Well, it is a 5X increase in the number of record votes we needed but still 90 percent.

I would note that Senator SCHUMER was elected in 1998. So he showed up here about 2 years before George W. Bush did.

Obama—despite the treatment of George W. Bush by the Democratic

Senators—stayed steady, 90 percent. Ninety percent of all of Barack Obama’s nominees through his first 6 months were confirmed by voice vote or unanimous consent.

Look at this huge drop here—from 90 percent with Barack Obama to not even two-thirds for Donald Trump in his first term.

And yes, it does decline by another 8 percent to Joe Biden. As is often said, what goes around comes around. The shoe will be on the other foot, and you might not like how it feels.

But look now at the unprecedented break from the customs of the Senate under these Senate Democrats and CHUCK SCHUMER: from 57 percent to zero—zero—not a single one. Not a single nominee of Donald Trump’s has been confirmed by voice vote or by unanimous consent in the first 6-plus months of his administration—a totally unprecedented blockade.

And we are not talking about the Secretary of Defense or the Secretary of the Treasury. Again, we are talking about jobs like the Chief Counsel for Advocacy at the SBA. I would bet most of you didn’t even know that job existed. They do important work, but does the Senate really need to spend 2 hours and two votes on it? I would suggest not, based on historical customs.

So when did this all start? Did it happen when TV cameras got in the Senate and Senators could come down here and perform for the TV camera? No. In fact, there are ample examples and precedent of highly controversial nominations not even requiring a 60-vote threshold.

Think about Clarence Thomas, maybe the best example—Clarence Thomas in 1991: The most consequential nomination we consider, a lifetime appointment to the Supreme Court of the United States. One of the most, if not the most, controversial nominees in history because of the lies and calumnies that Democratic Senators made against him, I would add—he was confirmed on a record vote of 52 to 48.

Now, you may say: Well, how did he get confirmed? He didn’t have 60 votes. And that is because, as late as 1991, it was considered unprecedented for a Senator to require what we call a cloture motion—a motion to end debate at a 60-vote threshold on a nominee—on any nominee, to include a Supreme Court Justice.

Think about some of the Senators who were here in 1991 who could have, on their own accord, irrespective of the wishes of another 99 Senators, demanded that Clarence Thomas get 60 votes before he be confirmed: Teddy Kennedy, Robert Byrd, Joe Biden, John Kerry—lions of the Democratic Senate. Not a single one of them came down here and said: I want to demand a 60-vote threshold for Clarence Thomas.

Maybe there were conversations about it, but maybe people like Teddy Kennedy and Robert Byrd said: We don’t do that. That is not the way things are done here—until 1999 when

CHUCK SCHUMER shows up, and he and other liberals in the Senate and a bunch of liberal law professors begin circulating the idea: No, we should require 60-vote thresholds for nominees.

And then, a couple of years into the Bush administration, they began to demand it, most notably on nominees to the court of appeals for the DC Circuit and, most notably of all those, on Miguel Estrada, a young Latino lawyer that they were afraid George Bush was going to later elevate to be the first Latino on the Supreme Court.

They took unprecedented actions. And that, led by CHUCK SCHUMER, is what brought us to this moment today. That is one reason why this says 90 percent and not 98 percent.

By 2013, Harry Reid, then-majority leader of the Senate, voted to change the rules of the Senate and said there will no longer be 60-vote thresholds on any office other than the Supreme Court. He did it right there at that desk. MITCH MCCONNELL stood at that desk, then the Republican leader, and said: What goes around comes around. The shoe may be on the other foot, and it may be sooner than you might think. And sure enough, 4 years later, in 2017, Republicans used the Harry Reid precedent and extended it to the Supreme Court. So now Supreme Court nominees, as was the case throughout history, only require a simple majority vote.

And then the Democrats engaged in the dilatory practices that they are using now, which is why this number was at 65, to demand 30 hours of debate. And I say “30 hours of debate” in air quotes because nobody comes down here in those times and debates the nominee pending on the floor. They talk about climate change or they recognize someone celebrating their 100th birthday back home, but nobody comes down here and has a serious debate on the merits of a nominee.

So, in 2019, Republicans used the Harry Reid precedent again to cut time for debate for most offices in the sub-Cabinet—not for courts of appeal, not for Cabinet members, not for the Supreme Court—from 30 hours to 2 hours. And that is why we spend 2 hours in between each one of these votes.

But Democrats, having lost again last year in the White House and the Senate, have brought us to this point: zero nominees confirmed by voice vote or by unanimous consent, an unprecedented blockade, all traced back to CHUCK SCHUMER’s decision when he got into the Senate to break the norms, the practices, the traditions of the U.S. Senate.

Well, this is not going to stand for much longer. It is up to our Democratic friends to decide how they would like to proceed. Do they want to follow CHUCK SCHUMER off the cliff? Because, if so, we will be happy to use the Harry Reid precedent again. We will eliminate 2 hours of debate time. We will eliminate motions to go in and out of executive session. We will eliminate

cloture motions entirely for nominees that currently take 2 hours of debate.

For today, maybe we will make a motion to adjourn. And when the House returns and votes on that motion, then Donald Trump can appoint this backlog of more than 150 nominees in a recess appointment.

It is the Democrats’ choice. They have a third choice. They could return to historical precedent. They could agree to voice vote today in the next few minutes—more than 150 nominees at this point, most of whom came out of our committee on a bipartisan basis, many of whom are nominated to offices that have literally never had a recorded vote on the floor of the U.S. Senate.

The question is up to the Democrats. Do you want to do this the easy way or do you want to do it the hard way? Because Republicans are prepared to finish what CHUCK SCHUMER started 22 years ago, and what it will do is return the U.S. Senate to those practices, customs, and traditions that prevailed here from the 18th century to 2003 for both parties, for Presidents of both parties. I think our Republic was just fine from the 19th century—I am sorry—the 18th century to 2003. But one way or another, I promise you, this is going to stop.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Maine.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REMEMBERING BILL NEUKOM

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, I rise today to acknowledge the passing of a friend, a great Washingtonian, Bill Neukom—one of the most thoughtful and caring human beings I have had the pleasure of working with and knowing.

Bill was a legendary leader in technology who made incredible contributions and helped pave the way for the innovation economy. As a philanthropist later in his life, he cared deeply about making the world a better place. His efforts will have long-standing impacts on his adopted home in the Pacific Northwest and also on his beloved native Bay Area and the world at large.

As Microsoft’s first general counsel, Bill played a pivotal role in the story of the company’s unparalleled business success. Those in the industry know the extraordinary engineering challenges the company overcame through genius and tenacity, providing the operating system for the world’s first mass-marketed desktop computer and beating all the competitors to the Holy Grail and making that operating sys-

tem multitask—a milestone that laid the technological foundation that would serve the world’s needs for decades to come and so many more yet to come. Bill was part of that.

People who are inside the company know the important legal roles that he played and know that the challenges they face would not have been able to be overcome without Bill’s contributions. Consider the accomplishments that came on his watch in the early days, being a small tech startup, and then he served as the chief counsel to one of the world’s most valuable and important companies.

In 1980, Microsoft signed perhaps the most advantageous business agreement ever. And at a time when few even knew what software was or could fathom how it would have monetary value, Bill Neukom argued and successfully defended the once-controversial notion that software was copyrightable. Now, of course, that is a bedrock principle that continues to provide the foundation for innovation in our economy. There are certain levels of productivity that we have all achieved because of it.

In confronting these incredible challenges, Bill always came through for his company, for his friends, and through incredible work in his community. He also was instrumental in embedding philanthropy and public service into the company’s culture, launching programs such as the Microsoft Giving Campaign and Libraries Online. And I remember that at one point in time, Bill once considered running for public office.

I am so glad that we all got the benefit of his contributions in the private sector and from his philanthropy. He continued to make those public contributions after leaving Microsoft, and he cofounded the World Justice Project, an international civil society organization that works to advance the rule of law around the world—such an unbelievable impact. As a result of his generosity and his intellect and resources, many organizations benefited.

He took on leadership roles in the American Bar Association, serving as president and earning the ABA Medal in 2020 in recognition of his career contributions.

Bill gave back to educational institutions that meant so much to him. He served as trustee at both Dartmouth and at the University of Puget Sound, and he made significant—significant—contributions to the University of Washington and to Stanford and to numerous other community causes.

Bill and his family founded the Neukom Family Foundation, supporting education, the environment, justice, and public health. One of his lasting legacies is his family foundation, which helped establish and grow the Wild Salmon Center.

Many of my conversations with Bill over the last several years have been about that very Northwest icon, the Pacific Northwest salmon.

This organization focuses on long-term, science-driven, and collaborative