

want one, why can't we move forward on doing something? I do not understand why we could not do that.

One of the other alternatives I have not suggested, but maybe what we can do is have a vote on not even paying for it, which I disagree with, but if that would be the will of the Senate, fine, we could set something up in that regard. We could have those votes out of the way this afternoon. We would not have to do the cloture vote in the morning. And we would see what the will of the Senate is. The way it is going to be, I have been told that the Republicans have been given their marching orders, as happens all of the time around here, that they are not free agents, that they cannot vote to invoke cloture on this alternative minimum tax, which I think would be a shame.

As I told my friend, the senior Senator from Kentucky, we would like to finish the business of this body by 2 weeks from Friday. That is our goal. I hope we can do that. I hope we do not have to work—we are not going to work on Christmas, but I hope we do not have to work Christmas week. It is possible we may have to do that. We have a number of important issues around here. We have an energy bill that is going to be sent either today or tomorrow from the House. I spoke to the Speaker this morning. We have to complete the alternative minimum tax. I think it would be the right thing to do to see what we are going to do on the Presidents's wiretapping proposal, as to how we can make that a better piece of legislation. We have gotten something that is bipartisan that has come out of the Judiciary Committee. The Judiciary Committee has met on a bipartisan basis. They have some things they want to change on that. But if we have to jump through all of the hoops and file cloture on that, that bill—the legislation that is now in force expires I believe on February 5. I think it would be good if we can complete that before we leave. There are certain other things we need to do before we leave. But it is a lot of work to do.

There is one minor little problem I did not talk about. We have to figure out some way to fund the Government for the rest of the year, either with some type of spending program to involve the Appropriations Committee or a last resort—something that both the Republican leader and I don't want—would be a continuing resolution which, in effect, eliminates the legislative branch of Government from being involved in what money is spent in the country for the next year.

Having said that, I would hope we can hold hands here a little bit in the next couple of weeks and see what we can get done: alternative minimum tax, farm bill, spending bills for our country, and if we really get fortunate, see if we can finish the FISA legislation, the wiretap legislation.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader.

AUTHORITY FOR COMMITTEE TO MEET

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, first with regard to the suggestion by my good friend, the majority leader, that there was some kind of objection to the Environment Committee meeting this morning, I was unaware of one. No such warning was given to the other side. The practice is for the committees to request permission on the day they meet. We did not indicate there was any objection. The committee is, in fact, meeting. I am unaware of any objection to its meeting.

If it makes it more formal, I ask unanimous consent that the committee continue to meet.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I think that is a wonderful gesture. I would accept that unanimous consent request that the committee be able to continue its deliberations today past 2 o'clock.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. REID. I appreciate that very much.

MOVING FORWARD

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, reclaiming the floor, I know for anybody who might be watching on the outside that all of this parliamentarian talk probably makes your eyes glaze over. But the fundamental problem is this: As recently as a year ago, my party was in the majority, and I had the same problem—Senator Frist and I had the same problem my good friend from Nevada has: Our members do not want to cast any dangerous votes, any votes they do not want to cast.

The first session of the previous Congress, the 109th, was the most productive legislative session of my time here in the Senate. I recall Senator Frist and myself saying over and over and over again to our members that if we are going to pass this bill, we are going to have to give the minority their votes. And people were whining and complaining about having to cast votes. I recall the Democratic whip, the Senator from Illinois, saying: The Senate is not the House, and making the point that the minority is going to get its votes in order to advance legislation.

I understand that my good friend from Nevada gets complaints from his members about having to cast votes, but the fundamental responsibility of the majority is to pass legislation. In order to do that in the Senate—we do not have a rules committee—you have to work with the minority, and you have to give the minority side a reasonable number of amendments. That is the case on the consideration of the alternative minimum tax fix, and that is also the case with regard to the farm bill.

Now, my advice both privately and publicly to my good friend, the majority leader, on the farm bill is take it up

and go forward, which is the way we have done it in the past, and it is amazing how quickly you move along. You can sometimes spend more time trying to get a consent agreement, which by its very nature requires every single Member of the Senate not to object—we could have made more progress on the farm bill by simply going to the bill, taking up amendments, and moving forward. That was my advice. It is still my advice. If we turned to the farm bill, even if we didn't have a very narrow amendment list, we would make dramatic progress and make it quickly. Why? Because I think there are significant numbers of Members of this body on both sides of the aisle who want to pass a farm bill. There may be a few who don't but a significant number do.

So here is where we are, December 5. We have nearly a full year's worth of work to finish before we adjourn for Christmas. It is a little after noon, and we are talking about why we are getting started now—I gather based on some misunderstanding about phantom objections that, in fact, did not exist on this side to the Environment Committee meeting.

We have offered our good friends a path forward on the AMT, on troop funding, on appropriations, on the Energy bill, and the farm bill. Yet we cannot seem to get the kind of bipartisan agreement that allows the minority to have some say over amendments in moving forward.

On the AMT, the chair of the Finance Committee called the Republican proposal constructive and said that it was the beginning of an agreement. That was yesterday. We want to make sure 23 million people are not ensnared by this middle-class tax hike and that the tax returns of 50 million Americans are not further delayed. The consequences of a delay will be felt by millions of taxpayers who will see a delay in their refunds next year.

It is, however, important to virtually every member of my conference that the alternative minimum tax, a tax that will never be levied and never be collected, not trigger a tax increase on a whole lot of other Americans. The effort to "pay for" the AMT is highly offensive to members on my side of the aisle, and I think the majority knows that, and the way to get the AMT and the extenders passed is not to "pay for" them—in other words, not to go out and raise taxes on a lot of other Americans in order to continue basically the status quo. We know we are never going to levy the AMT, and we are never going to collect it. The same is true with the extenders. We know we will pass that package. That is existing tax relief. Why should we raise taxes on some other Americans in order to maintain the status quo, which is the absence of an alternative minimum tax and the extension of the extenders? That is a very strongly held principle, and I believe that is the view of enough Senators to insist that is the way it goes forward.