

This is what my friend, the minority leader, said in January of this year in praise of the conference committee:

If the Senate version is different than the one the House sends over, send it off to conference. That's how things are supposed to work around here. We used to call it legislating.

That is what the Republican leader said.

A few days later, Senator MCCONNELL extolled the virtue of regular order by saying this:

Remember, regular order is how the Senate is supposed to function. . . . The public is supposed to have a chance to scrutinize the proposals before us.

Here we have the junior Senator from Texas, the Speaker of the House, and the Republican leader saying we should have regular order. We should pass legislation, as we have done and the House has done, and then work it out in conference.

So we agree. I agree with those three people. Do you know something else. The American public agrees.

They suddenly don't like what they wished for. We passed our budget; the House Republicans passed theirs. The next step under regular order is to move to conference to negotiate a compromise.

I can't understand—maybe I do. I think I understand why Republicans don't want to debate their budget in the light of day.

You see, the Ryan budget, which they extol to each other, which passed the House, would turn Medicare into a voucher program—the end of Medicare as we know it.

The Ryan Republican budget would lower taxes for the rich while the middle class foots the bill. That is in their budget.

The Republican budget would rip the safety net from under the elderly, the middle class, veterans, and the poor. No wonder they don't want to go to conference. No wonder they don't want transparency.

The Democratic budget, by contrast, would preserve or protect Medicare for our children and grandchildren. The Democratic budget would ask the wealthiest Americans to contribute just a little bit more to help reduce the deficit. The Democratic budget would balance smart spending cuts with new revenue from closing loopholes.

It is obvious, then, why the Republicans don't want to compare the sensible Senate budget with the extreme House budget. The extreme House Republican budget was resoundingly rejected by the voters in November. That is what Governor Romney touted. Remember, Congressman RYAN was his Vice Presidential candidate. They ran together.

Now it is time for each side to stand for what it believes. As the junior Senator from Texas said late last year, we have "got to go on record and say this is what we want to do, this is our budget."

Democrats aren't afraid to debate our principles in the light of day. We

aren't afraid to try to resolve our differences in a conference committee instead of behind closed doors. This has been the custom in the Senate and House of Representatives for more than 200 years.

Why are Republicans so afraid? Why are they blocking us from continuing this process in public?

We heard from the junior Senator from Texas: Republicans will only go to conference if Democrats agree ahead of time to give in to every one of their demands. That is a strange one. Sure, we will go to conference, but before we go you have to agree to everything we want.

If Republicans can't rig the game in their favor, he said, there will be no game, no conference, no legislating at all. Democrats want to put deadline-day negotiations and last-minute fixes behind us. We want to engage in a responsible legislative process under regular order, and we will keep pushing the process forward. Passing a budget in each Chamber is a good step to restoring regular order. It is only a first step. The next step is to sit down and resolve our differences.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following my remarks and those of Senator MCCONNELL, the Senate will be in morning business until 10 a.m. At 10 a.m., the Senate will recess until 11:30 to allow for the joint meeting of Congress with the President of the Republic of Korea. When the Senate reconvenes, we will resume consideration of S. 601, the Water Resources Development Act. At 2 p.m. there will be three rollcall votes in relation to amendments to the bill.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

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

WELCOMING THE PRESIDENT OF SOUTH KOREA

Mr. MCCONNELL. Later today we will welcome the President of the South Korea to address both Houses of Congress. President Park is a truly extraordinary woman, the first female chief executive of her country and, I might add, a conservative.

She is a strong leader too. I suppose that is because she endured so much in her own life; the assassination of her mother when she was only 22, the assassination of her father a few years after that, and the violent attack she herself endured in 2006.

Yet beyond a scar on her face, you would not know. She didn't recoil in fear. She threw herself right back into the rough and tumble of public life. So she is tough. I know this tenacious leader is committed to the United

States-South Korea alliance which is so important to both of our countries. The transition from her predecessor, President Lee, could not have been smoother. Both his administration and hers have been true partners, especially at a time of high contention.

We welcome President Park and look forward to hearing what she has to say later today.

NOMINATION OF THOMAS PEREZ

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, this morning I would like to say a few words about the nomination of Thomas Perez as Labor Secretary.

The Perez nomination has generated a fair amount of controversy. For those who haven't tuned in yet to the debate surrounding his nomination, I would like to take a few minutes this morning to explain why.

The first thing to say about this nomination is that neither I nor anyone else on this side of the aisle has anything against Mr. Perez personally. As a graduate of Harvard Law School, there are a lot of things he could have done other than advocate for those struggling on the fringes of our society.

Yet when it comes to a vote such as this, we have to weigh a lot more than a nominee's intentions. We have to look at how those intentions square with the higher obligation that any nominee, but especially a Cabinet nominee, has to the rule of law. It is on this point where this nomination becomes so controversial and where the deference that Senators of both parties generally grant Presidents when it comes to picking Cabinet nominees begins to break down.

By all accounts, Tom Perez is not just a man with a heart for the poor, he is a committed ideologue who appears willing, quite frankly, to say or do anything to achieve his ideological end.

His willingness, time and again, to bend or ignore the law and misstate the facts in order to advance his far-left ideology leads me and others to conclude he would continue to do so if he were confirmed to another and much more consequential position of public trust.

Take, for instance, his efforts while on the Montgomery County Council to get Canadian drugs imported to the United States. According to the Washington Post, Perez tried to get the county to import these drugs even after—even after—a top FDA official said doing so would be, in his words, "undeniably illegal."

What was Perez's response? "Federal law is muddled," he said at the time. "Sometimes you have to push the envelope."

Think about that statement. "Sometimes you have to push the envelope." Is that the kind of approach to Federal law we want in those we confirm to run Federal agencies? Folks who think if a Federal law is inconvenient to their ends they can simply characterize it as

unclear and use that as an excuse to do whatever they want?

If that is not a red flag for those of us who have to review a Presidential nominee, I don't know what is.

Now, again, someone might say everybody in politics has to make judgments about how a given law is to be interpreted. Those who disagree with those judgments call it pushing the envelope. Mr. Perez, however, does not merely push the envelope. All too often he circumvents or ignores a law with which he disagrees.

Here are a few examples: As a member of the Montgomery County Council, Mr. Perez pushed through a county policy that encouraged the circumvention of Federal immigration law. Later, as head of the Federal Government's top voting rights watchdog, he refused to protect the right to vote for Americans of all races, in violation of the very law he was charged to enforce.

In the same post at the Department of Justice, Perez directed the Federal Government to sue, against the advice of career attorneys in his own office. In another case involving a Florida woman who was lawfully exercising her First Amendment right to protest in front of an abortion clinic, the Federal judge who threw out Mr. Perez's lawsuit said he was "at a loss as to why the government chose to prosecute this particular case" in the first place.

This is what pushing the envelope means in the case of Mr. Perez—a flip-pant and dismissive attitude about the boundaries everyone else has to follow for the sake of the liberal causes in which he believes. In short, it means a lack of respect for the rule of law and a lack of respect for the need of those in positions of power to follow it.

Just as troubling, however, is the fact that Mr. Perez has been called to account for his failures to follow the law, and he has been less than forth-right about his actions when called to account. When he testified that politics played no role in his office's decision not to pursue charges against members of a far-left group who may have tried to prevent others from voting, for instance, the Department's own watchdog said "Perez's testimony did not reflect the entire story." And a Federal judge said the evidence before him "appear[ed] to contradict . . . Perez's testimony."

Perez has also made misleading statements about this case under oath—under oath—to Congress and the U.S. Civil Rights Commission.

Mr. Perez's involvement in an alleged quid pro quo deal with the city of St. Paul, MN, also fits the pattern. Here was a case where Perez was allegedly so concerned about a potential Supreme Court challenge to the legality of a theory he championed in housing discrimination suits known as "disparate impact," he quietly worked out a deal with St. Paul officials whereby they would withdraw their appeal to the Supreme Court of a disparate impact case if he arranged for the Federal

Government to throw out two whistleblower complaints against St. Paul that could have recovered millions of dollars for the taxpayers that had been falsely obtained. The two whistleblowers' complaints were dropped, and the Supreme Court never heard the disparate impact case.

Perez told investigators he hadn't even heard of the disparate impact case until the Court initially decided to hear it. But that has been contradicted by HUD Deputy Assistant Secretary Sara Pratt, who told investigators she and Mr. Perez discussed the case well before that.

Taken together, all of this paints the picture, for me at least, not of a passionate liberal who sees himself as patiently operating within the system and through the democratic process to advance a particular set of strongly held beliefs but a crusading ideologue whose conviction about his own rightness on the issues leads him to believe the law does not apply to him. Unbound by the rules that apply to everyone else, Perez seems to view himself as free to employ whatever means—whatever means—at his disposal, legal or otherwise, to achieve his ideological goals.

To say this is problematic would be an understatement. As Secretary of Labor, Perez could be handling numerous contentious issues and implementing many politically sensitive laws, including laws enforcing the disclosure of political activity by labor unions. Perez's devotion to the cause of involuntary universal voter registration is also deeply concerning to me personally, and I would imagine many of my colleagues in the Senate also believe in the absolute centrality of maintaining the integrity of the vote.

Americans of all political persuasions have the right to expect the head of such a sensitive department, whether appointed by a Republican or Democrat, will implement and follow the law in a fair and reasonable way. I do not believe they could expect as much from Mr. Perez.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

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, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 10 a.m., with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each and with the time equally divided and controlled between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from Massachusetts is recognized.

Ms. WARREN. I thank the Chair.

(The remarks of Ms. WARREN pertaining to the introduction of S. 897 are located in today's RECORD under

"Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

JOINT MEETING OF THE TWO HOUSES—ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF SOUTH KOREA, HER EXCELLENCY PARK GEUN-HYE

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will stand in recess until 11:30 a.m. for the purpose of attending a joint meeting with the House of Representatives to hear the President of South Korea, Her Excellency Park Geun-hye.

Thereupon, the Senate, at 9:59 a.m., recessed until 11:31 a.m. and the Senate, preceded by its Secretary, Nancy Erickson, Drew Willison, Deputy Sergeant at Arms, and the Vice President of the United States, proceeded to the Hall of the House of Representatives to hear an address delivered by Her Excellency Park Geun-hye, President of South Korea.

(The address delivered by the President of South Korea is printed in today's RECORD of the House of Representatives.)

At 11:31 a.m., the Senate, having returned to its Chamber, reassembled and was called to order by the Presiding Officer (Ms. HEITKAMP).

WATER RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT ACT OF 2013

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of S. 601, which the clerk will report.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 601) to provide for the conservation and development of water and related resources, to authorize the Secretary of the Army to construct various projects for improvements to rivers and harbors of the United States, and for other purposes.

Pending:

Boxer/Vitter amendment No. 799, in the nature of a substitute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the time until 2 p.m. will be equally divided between the two leaders or their designees.

The Senator from California.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, what is the order?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senate is in a period of debate prior to votes in relationship to S. 601.

Mrs. BOXER. Madam President, how much time is going to be controlled by Senator COBURN, the opposition to his amendments, and Senator WHITEHOUSE?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma controls 40 minutes. The majority controls 75 minutes.