

January 5, 2011

Dear Senator,

As organizations representing a range of interests and ideologies, we are united in our assessment that the current functioning of the United States Senate is problematic to our democracy.

In place of a deliberative process that prioritizes open debate, accountability, and cooperation, the current Senate has descended into gridlock and partisan warfare at great expense to our nation and its ability to rise to the challenges of our time.

The rules governing the Senate, in addition to the way these rules are manipulated, are in need of examination. The unprecedented use of the filibuster and holds, often done in secret and out of the view of the American people, does a disservice to our democracy. Though the Senate averaged approximately one filibuster per year until 1970, Senators in the past two sessions have used this tactic roughly 70 times per year. There were 139 motions for cloture in the last Congress - that was a new record high, and a 100% increase in the number of cloture motions from the Congress before that

Recently, voices from across the political spectrum have been highlighting the gridlock plaguing the U.S. Senate - and noting that the problematic rules governing the body are at the heart of the problem. Senator-elect Dan Coats of Indiana, a Republican who served in the Senate in the 1990s, recently stated, "The American people deserve that we are transparent with them, that we take one item at a time, that we register our yeas and our nays and be accountable to the American people for what we've done."

This description of the democratic process, which should be a bedrock of the way the Senate governs itself, has been woefully absent in recent sessions, with profound consequences for our nation. As President Obama recently said, "if we do not fix how the filibuster is used in the Senate, then it is going to be very difficult for us over the long term to compete in a very fast moving global environment."

As a new class of Senators takes its seats, we hope they will join a growing array of bi-partisan voices in recognizing the need for the Senate to live up to its best traditions. We, the undersigned organizations, call upon members of the Senate to make transparency and accountability a priority and to end the needless obstruction that threatens the vibrancy of our democracy.

Sincerely,

360.org

AFL-CIO

Alliance for Justice

Americans for Democratic Action
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Brennan Center for Justice
Business and Professional People for the Public Interest
Campaign for Americas Future
Center for Inquiry
Center for Reproductive Rights
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Citizens for Tax Justice
Coalition to Stop Gun Violence
Common Cause
Consumer Action
Consumer Watchdog
Credo Action
CREW
Culture Project
Communications Workers of America
Daily Kos
DC Vote
Democracy 21
Demos
Equal Justice Society
Equal Rights Advocates
Generational Alliance
Human Rights Campaign
International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers
Lambda Legal
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
League of Conservation Voters
League of Women Voters
League of United Latin American Citizens
Mexican American Legal Defense Fund
National Center for Lesbian Rights
National Council of Women's Organizations
National Employment Lawyers Association
National Family Planning & Reproductive Health Association
National Organization for Women
Progressive Congress
Sargent Shriver Center on Poverty Law
Service Employees International Union
Sierra Club

TASH

The Advocacy Fund

The Rockefeller Brothers Fund

The Shalom Center

Tides

UAW

United Food and Commercial Workers

United Steelworkers

USAction

United States Student Association

Voices for Progress

Woman's National Democratic Club

Women's Law Project