Opinion
News
Editorial



(Unsplash/Andrew Ebrahim)

by NCR Editorial Staff

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

July 1, 2021

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

As Senate Republicans deploy the filibuster in order to frustrate President Joe Biden's agenda on a host of issues from voting rights to the Equality Act, it is time to reacquaint ourselves with a few basic moral lessons we all learned as kids, and to note the limits of those same lessons.

"Good things come to those who wait." In this fast-paced, technocratic culture, this bit of proverbial wisdom is more needed than ever. Delayed gratification seems to have vanished from the sociocultural landscape. Americans are primed by advertising from a very young age to want it now, no matter what it is that they want.

But in the political universe where Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell can wield the filibuster, good things never come. We have been waiting for some sense of fairness to be restored to the tax code. We have been waiting for Congress to shore up voting rights after the Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act in its 2013 case *Shelby County* v. *Holder* — voting rights that are now under assault by Republican-led state legislatures around the country. We have been waiting for comprehensive immigration reform since President George W. Bush tried to pass it in 2007.



(Unsplash/Jason Sung)

"What goes around, comes around." This moral lesson is a hedge against the idea that virtue is its own reward. We want our children to do the right thing because it is the right thing. With this lesson we also purchase some insurance by pointing out that if you are nasty to people, they are likely to be nasty back to you, and if you are generous and kind to people, they are likely to be generous and kind to you also.

Is there anything generous or kind about today's Senate Republicans? They deliver only two kinds of speeches, nasty speeches and really nasty speeches. They would sell fear by the bottle if they could: They are scared of critical race theory, of absentee voting, of immigrants, but somehow they now claim they were not afraid when a mob was banging at the door to the Senate chamber on Jan. 6, which was a good time to be afraid, if not for their personal safety then for the safety of the Constitution.

The problem with karma is that it meets its match when confronted with someone who acts in bad faith. Is there any doubt that McConnell acts in bad faith? He denied a vote to Supreme Court nominee Merrick Garland in 2016 because a national election was only eight months away, but then pushed through the nomination of Justice Amy Coney Barrett in 2020 when a national election was six weeks away. Now, when asked if he would permit a vote on a Biden nominee in 2024, he says he would not. Bad faith.



Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., gives a thumbs up after the confirmation vote of Amy Coney Barrett to the Supreme Court on Capitol Hill Oct. 26, 2020, in Washington. They voted 52-48 to confirm President Donald Trump's nominee. (CNS/Reuters/Joshua Roberts)

"The ends do not justify the means." This is a caution to the well-intentioned, those with admirable goals, to remember that history is replete with tyrants who had magnificent goals but who sought to achieve them with scurrilous methods. The nobility of an objective can never excuse monstrous behavior. It is a strong antidote to rationalization and self-justification, both of which are endemic in politics.

On the other hand, if the ends do not justify the means, what possibly could? The filibuster was devised to make sure the minority in the Senate is heard. Hearing from the minority is one thing and allowing the minority to block all legislative action is another. And that is precisely what McConnell and his acolytes have done, use the filibuster to essentially shut down the legislative branch of government.

> Hearing from the minority is one thing and allowing the minority to block all legislative action is another.
>
> Tweet this

The ends for which the United States government was created are set forth in the preamble to the Constitution: form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, you know the list. To meet those ends, the founders set up a government in which the consent of the governed is the source of all authority, mediated through constitutional provisions to prevent any tyranny by the majority, while nonetheless granting to the majority the right and the responsibility to pursue those enumerated ends for which the government was established.

So, we ask Republicans: How does refusing to make it easier for Americans to vote serve to "establish justice" or "insure domestic tranquility"? How does it "promote the general welfare" to refuse to enact universal child care? Are the "blessings of liberty" secured by denying gay men and women the same rights as every other citizen? Which end of government is enhanced when the richest people in the country pay no taxes whatsoever?

It is time to kill the filibuster before it kills our democracy.

Advertisement

A version of this story appeared in the **July 9-22, 2021** print issue under the headline: It's time to kill the filibuster before it kills our democracy.