Whatever happened to majority rule?

Mario T. García | Feb. 9, 2010 NCR Today

For years now, I have felt frustrated at how dysfunctional our national politics are. This has been exacerbated by the recent turn of events surrounding the health reform legislation in particular in the U.S. Senate.

As I tell my students, the Senate is an anti-democratic body and don?t let anyone fool you on that.

First of all, it is ludicrous that a small-populated state such as North Dakota should have the same representation in the Senate as California with the largest number of people of all 50 states. Second, and the health care issues really reminds us of this, there is the equally ant-democratic filibustering tradition in the Senate where you need a super majority of 60 votes to cut off debate in order to get to a vote. The result is either stalemate or the watering down of legislation as occurred in the health bill in order to get those votes.

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But what I find even more frustrating is that in fact there is a way to get to majority rule in the Senate if only the Democrats including President Obama had the will and the courage to use it. This is the so-called reconciliation process that only requires a 51-vote majority to pass budget-related bills. It turns out that this is how President Bush in his first term achieved his tax cuts for the very rich. If Bush and the Republicans had no problems using reconciliation what is the problems with Obama and the Democrats? Use it!

This is the only way to get around a monolithic Republican no vote on all of the President?s legislative agenda. I wish the president and the Senate Democrats would start thinking more about the hopes of the majority that elected them into office and less about the Republicans and those who did not vote for them and will not vote for them in the future. There is no compromise in today?s politics.