

The INDEPENDENT

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Opinion

Why, or why not filibuster?

With the Senate nearing a battle on rules changes, former Senate majority leader George J. Mitchell recalled in a May 10, 2005, New York Times Op-Ed column, words spoken 55 years ago by Senator Margaret Chase Smith of Maine against a member of her own party.

"I don't believe the American people will uphold any political party that puts political exploitation above national interest," the senator said. "Surely we Republicans aren't that desperate for victory. While it might be a fleeting victory for the Republican Party, it would be a more lasting defeat for the American people. ...it would ultimately be suicide for the two-party system that has protected our American liberties from the dictatorship of a one-party system."

The circumstances are now different, but the principles of preserving our system of checks and balances are at the heart of the Senate rules debate, Mitchell wrote.

Our founders created a system to prevent abuse of power. The president's veto power is a check on Congress. The Senate's power to confirm or reject judicial nominees balances the president's authority to nominate them. The proposal by some Republican senators to change rules that have governed the Senate for two centuries now puts that system in danger.

Since 1789, the Senate has rejected nearly 20 percent of all nominees to the Supreme Court, many without a vote.

In 1968 Republican senators filibustered to block voting on President Lyndon Johnson's nominee for chief justice of the Supreme Court. During debate, Republican Senator. Robert Griffin, said: "It is important to realize that it has not been unusual for the Senate to indicate its lack of approval for a nomination by making sure that it never came to a vote."

Between 1968 and 2001, both parties used filibusters to oppose judicial nominees. In 2000, the last year of Bill Clinton's presidency, Republican senators filibustered two of his nominees for circuit judges. They also prevented Senate votes on more than 60 of Mr. Clinton's judicial nominees.

Filibustering to prevent votes on judicial nominees is not a new tactic invented by Senate Democrats.

Senate rules can be changed, and often have been. But Senate Republicans don't have the votes for a change within the rules. So they propose to act unilaterally to get their way and claim their actions are justified because the filibuster is being used unfairly to stop the confirmation of President Bush's nominees. But 208 of the president's 218 judicial nominees have been approved. That is 95 percent of Mr. Bush's judicial nominees, a higher percentage of approval than any of his three predecessors achieved.

Let's hope that Oregon's Senator Gordon Smith understands history and the principles behind checks and balances as well as Senator Margaret Chase Smith did.



Large class sizes harm students and society

To the Editor:

Class size: Does it really matter? As a parent who attended the public forum held May 4 and the school board meeting on May 12, I am concerned that the voice of the educators, parents and the public sector are not being heard or taken seriously.

We all have a vested interest in our children's education. Washington Grade School is faced with overcrowded classrooms. Larger classes have been plaguing Oregon's School Districts but now it has come home. It has been apparent in this year's first grade classes which each have about 28 to 29 students per class.

I believe that large class sizes continue to wreck many positive advances in education and learning. The Board of Education and many of the uninformed general public would assert that reducing class size is too costly, and furthermore, that there is no proof or evidence that small class sizes

make a difference in learning.

There are pros and cons in class size and the effect it has on learning. Research has shown that small classes of 15 to 20 students result in learning gains on standardized tests in reading and mathematics with considerable marked improvement in the earlier grades. The advantages gained from being in small classes have lasting benefits into the later years of the students lives.

As a parent I am able to take the time to volunteer. I see that the teacher's workload has increased and that also takes away from time spent on the student-teacher relationship that is crucial in assessing each student's needs. With smaller class sizes teachers can get to know each student and can readily identify their strengths and weaknesses, thereby increasing the ability to make a plan to help improve the weaknesses. This in turn gives students the confidence to attend school and continue their education. Then, truancy is reduced.

The ramifications of large

class sizes for our society as a whole are enormous. Poor education can lead young people to crime. Which might lead some to our overcrowded prison system. Inmates have an average education level of below twelfth grade. The average cost to society of keeping one person in jail is over \$24,000 per year. The cost of instructing one student in Vernonia is just about \$8,000 per year. We are now paying for neglecting to properly fund schools. Higher crime rates and the lack of qualified workers for our industries have negatively impacted our society.

The Board of Education and the Budget Committee have got to do more than give an aide to our educators on Fridays as has been discussed for the following school year. It is not enough.

Have all options been discussed and researched that would benefit the students and the teachers? We do not want to become desensitized to the harm large classes do to our students and ourselves. We

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