

⁶⁹(...continued)

The Senate and the House have their tensions between them, as do the executive and the legislative, all these with the built-in tensions that the forefathers took great care to fashion in order to make this a system of checks and balances.

But in the reconciliation bill, we were about to inflict our own mortal wound, as Brutus did with the same dagger that he had plunged into Caesar's blood, bringing a bill of such magnitude here which contained scores of measures, on any one of which the Senate should have had the opportunity to debate at full length and to amend. What hidden pieces of legislation might come to the floor in a package of this size? What hidden legislation we might vote upon and come to regret at a later time?

This is an institution for the protection of minorities, an institution in which the minority can put a bridle on the majority for at least a while until the country can be awakened to the mistakes that might otherwise be visited upon the people. We should not view this Senate lightly, and never should be party to weakening this institution, with which we have been blessed.

Yes, there were limitations on debate in 1919 in the League of Nations debate, and in 1926 in the World Court debate, limitations through the cloture rule, but their price was substantial concessions by the majority.

The Senate is . . . the only forum in which minorities are protected against the sudden waves of passion that might sweep over the Nation.

A reconciliation bill is a super gag rule, the foremost ever created by this institution. Normal cloture is but an infinite speck on the distant horizon when compared with a reconciliation bill. Cloture may be invoked on any measure, motion, or matter. Sixteen Senators sign a cloture petition; parts of 3 days transpire before cloture is invoked; and when it is invoked, it is invoked on only one matter or one measure or one motion. Then there are 30 hours of debate. The provision is within that rule that that time may be extended by a three-fifths majority vote to whatever — 40 hours, 50, 75 or 100 hours. But not so with reconciliation. Reconciliation comes to the floor. There is no opportunity to debate a motion to proceed, whereas, under cloture, an attack can be made by the minority even on the motion to proceed. The minority ought to be zealous in protecting that right; the minority may be on this side of the aisle tomorrow, as it was yesterday.

Under reconciliation there is no motion provided to extend that time beyond 20 hours, but there is a motion that is nondebatable and can be invoked by only a majority of Members to reduce the time, and it can be reduced to 10 hours or to 5 hours or to 2 hours or to 1 hour without debate. Only a majority vote is needed to reduce it to no time:

Mr. President, I move that the time remaining on reconciliation be reduced to no time. What can you do about it? Weep. Reconciliation is one real beartrap.

And so it has been with sorrow that some of us have seen what has been happening on reconciliation. It is a process which has gotten out of hand and, if continued, it will undermine the deliberative nature of the institution.

It is a process by which committees of the Senate may dictate to the Senate. You take what we give you. There is not a thing you can do about it.

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