

December 18, 2012

Dear Senator:

The BlueGreen Alliance – a coalition of 14 environmental and labor partners representing over 15 million members – urges you to call for changes to the Senate’s procedural rules for the 113th Congress. In particular, we find the current use of the filibuster to be concerning and detrimental to the American public because it curtails – and even outright prevents – crucial debates on key issues.

At a time when the United States is facing unparalleled challenges – a languid economic recovery, a deteriorating middle class, and a changing climate that is already creating devastating and unpredictable weather events – we need our nation’s leaders to debate and take action to address these pressing issues. But under current rules, discussions on the Senate floor have been silenced by excessive use of the filibuster.

Once employed sparingly in exceptional instances of intense opposition, filibustering has now become common practice at the expense of vital issues such as the Employee Free Choice Act and Climate Change. In place of bipartisanship, collegiality and compromise, we now have rampant obstruction. This must come to an end. With common sense reforms, routine and reflexive obstruction can give way to constructive debate and can ensure that the Senate will once again be able to address the critical issues facing our country.

We therefore ask that U.S. Senate adopt the following rules on their first legislative day:

- Those objecting to legislation should only have one opportunity to filibuster legislation. Specifically, the ability to bring up a bill for simple debate (the motion to proceed) should not be subjected to a filibuster.
- Those wishing to filibuster legislation must actually hold the floor and be required to actually debate the legislation. It would end "silent" filibusters where one Senator quietly objects and is not required to take the Senate floor.
- Instead of the burden required to break a filibuster being on the majority to deliver 60 votes, those objecting to the legislation and wishing to filibuster must produce 41 votes to sustain a filibuster.

- The process for approving nominations should be streamlined, including shortening the amount of time required for debate once a nomination is brought to the Senate floor.

Senate rules are not outlined in the Constitution and have been changed numerous times in history. Doing so does not require legislative feats, but it does require the conviction and forethought of our nation's elected officials on the very first day they step on the floor for the 113th Congress. We urge you to stand up for the democratic process by calling for filibuster reform on January 3rd.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Foster". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

David Foster
Executive Director