

HARKIN FILIBUSTER REFORM WILL BREAK SENATE GRIDLOCK WHILE PRESERVING THE RIGHTS OF THE MINORITY

“The filibuster rule has become an absurd and destructive anachronism. At issue is a fundamental principle of our democracy—rule of the majority in a legislative body. We simply cannot govern a 21st Century superpower when a minority of just 41 senators, representing potentially as little as 11 percent of the population, can dictate action—or inaction—not just to the majority of senators but to a majority of the American people. The Senate cannot continue down this path of obstruction, paralysis and de facto minority rule.” – *Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA)*

Harkin Proposal Would Preserve the Rights of the Minority While Allowing the Senate to Govern:

- The filibuster, once used as an extraordinary tool in the rarest of instances, is now used or threatened on virtually every measure and every nominee. From 1917—when the Senate first adopted cloture rules for ending debate—until 1969, there were fewer than 50, or an average of less than one filibuster a year. In contrast, during the last Congress, the majority had to file a record 139 motions to end filibusters. Already this Congress, there have been 123 motions to end filibusters.
- This obstruction has delayed consideration and votes on critical measures like the extension of unemployment benefits, disclosure of campaign spending by corporations, defense authorizations and immigration reform. **The result is that in critical areas of public policy, Congress is simply unable to respond effectively to the challenges that confront the United States.**
- The American public supports filibuster reform. Sixty-four percent of voters contacted by the polling firm Public Policy Polling said it was time to get rid of the legislative blocking maneuver. Fifty-seven percent of Republican respondents said they opposed the filibuster, as did 61 percent of Independents and 77 percent of Democrats. [PPP surveyed 548 voters Nov. 2 and 3, 2010. Margin of Error = 4.2%.]
- Under the Harkin proposal, Senators would have ample time to debate and consider legislation, and both parties would be guaranteed the right to amend the pending legislation, but at the end of a full and vigorous debate, there would be an up or down vote.
- The filibuster is not in the Constitution. The framers put in place important checks and balances to temper pure majority rule. To become a law, a bill must pass both houses of Congress and is subject to the President’s veto power. Historically, the filibuster was used very rarely, and that did not mean that it was any easier to enact legislation. Before 1806, the Senate had a rule that permitted a simple majority to stop debate on the pending issue and proceed to a vote, and since 1917 there have been four significant reforms of the filibuster. Thus, filibuster reform stands squarely within a tradition of updating Senate rules as appropriate to ensure a smoothly operating government.

In 1995, while serving in the Democratic minority, Senator Harkin introduced a bill to do away with the filibuster. Senator Harkin still feels that majority rule is one of the most basic precepts of our democracy. For more information on his efforts to reform the filibuster, click [here](#).