

from our viewpoint...

Senate rules fight a schooyard tussle

Well, the kids are at it again. Kids. As in United States Senators. Yes, United States Senators. They are fighting over a proposed change in Senate rules as they relate to filibustering — that ages-old tactic whereby one party talks another’s proposals to death. We aren’t sure that even the senators themselves fully understand what is going on. Each senator who goes before the television cameras has a different view as to what is involved. All we know at this time is that the Democrats are sticking to their guns when to comes to filibustering President Bush’s judicial nominees. Their fightin’ cousins, the Republicans, want to change the rule to prohibit the tactic. And instead of the required 67 votes necessary to cut off a filibuster, they want a simple majority, 50 plus 1. The Republicans enjoy a slim majority in the United States Senate, and should a couple of Republicans join the Democrats in retaining the filibuster rule as it stands, chances are good it would end up in a 50-50 tie. en Vice President Dick Cheney would cast the deciding vote, and you know how that would come out. Former Senate majority leader and presidential candidate Bob Dole cautioned his party a while back to give thought to that day when the Republicans won’t be in control. When that happens, they would be hung by a situation they created with this rule change. The average American going about his daily responsibilities see this as nothing more than political garbage, and how right they are. Our senators are acting like kids in a playground scuffle. How disgusting. The president, whoever the president is at any given time, isn’t always going to get what he wants. And President Bush, as stubborn as any we’ve ever had in that office, needs to understand that. But then we think he does. It’s the senators who don’t. Should we mention term limits? —Tom Dreiling

where to write

U.S. Sen. Pat Roberts, 109 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-4774; web address — roberts.senate.gov
U.S. Sen. Sam Brownback, 303 Hart Senate Office Building, Washington D.C. 20510. (202) 224-6521; web e-mail address — brownback.senate.gov/CMEmail.me
U.S. Rep. Jerry Moran, 2443 Rayburn House Office Building, Washington, D.C. 20515. (202) 225-2715; Fax (202) 225-5124 e-mail address — jerry.moran@mail.house.gov
State Rep. Jim Morrison, State Capitol Building Rm. 174-W, Topeka, KS 66612. (785) 296-7676; e-mail address — jmorriso@house.state.ks.us
State Sen. Ralph Ostmeyer, State Capitol Building, Rm. 128-S, 300 SW 10th, Topeka, Kan. 66612. (785-296-7399; e-mail address — ostmeyer@senate.state.ks.us
Kansas Attorney General Phil Kline, 301 S.W. 10th, Lower Level, Topeka, KS 66612-1597 (785) 296-3751 Fax (785) 291-3699 TTY: (785) 291-3767

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 Member: Kansas Press Association
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 e-mail: **star-news@nwkanssas.com**

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Tom Betz, Editor
Pat Schiefen, Copy Editor
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nwkansas.com
N.T. Betz, Director of Internet Services
 (ntbetz@nwkansas.com)
Evan Barnum, Systems Admin.(support@nwkansas.com)

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I’m curious how words and phrases start

I don’t know about you, but I’m often curious about words and phrases, how they originated, when they came into use. Here are some I’ve discovered from my reading. Some are very old and at least one is very new.

1. Buck — “A deer hide, or buck skin, had been the medium of exchange with the Indians for years. A buck had come to mean a dollar.” Luce St. Clair Robson, Walk in My Soul.
2. Bonfire — “As the days grew longer, we carried the last gnawed of winter out of the fort to pile on the bone-fire, which would be a sacrificing of the old, a cleansing and a preparation for the new.” Morgan Llywelyn,
3. Honeymoon — “‘Take your wife to whatever private place you have prepared for her and celebrate together until the honey moon wanes.’ Following marriage, each new couple was traditionally given a cask of mead, which was honey wine, to drink, and whatever remained of the Beltaine (the first day of May, according to the old Scottish calendar) moon, they were allowed to be alone together.” Morgan Llywelyn, Druids.
4. Origin of nursery rhyme: “The Eagle (an English pub) is where an old nursery rhyme comes from. Years ago, City Road (on which the pub was located) used to be the heart of the tailoring trade, and toward the end of the week,



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the tailors would find themselves short of money, and they’d put their pressing iron — or weasel — into pawn until payday. So someone wrote a nursery rhyme about it: ‘Up and down the city road, In and out the Eagle, That’s the way the money goes, Pop goes the weasel.’” — Memories of Midnight by Sidney Sheldon.

5. Nightmare — Nightmare “goes back to the Middle English nitz, or ‘night,’ and mare, or ‘goblin.’ The old superstition is that is prefers to ride after four AM. — Memories of Midnight by Sidney Sheldon.

6. Take a dive — “When you go to a (homeless) shelter, they tell you about God and forgiveness and we’re all brothers and we want to be saved. Then they ask anyone who believes in the good book to come forward and acknowledge his Maker. So you get religion. You run up, fall on your knees, and shout something about being saved. That’s taking a dive.” Mary Higgins Clark, Loves Music, Moves to Dance.

Social Security won’t pass as a mandate

By Dick Morris
 House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Thomas, R-Calif., said it best when he commented on President Bush’s proposal for progressive indexing of Social Security benefits:

“I know some rich people, and if you ask them whether they would rather have a tax increase or their (Social Security) benefits cut, they’ll immediately say, ‘Cut the benefits.’” Well, Congressman, let’s ask them, shall we, instead of making the decision for them, as Bush has proposed in his Social Security reform program. If we offered people a choice — lower benefits or high taxes — Thomas is correct that most of those whose benefits will be cut under the Bush program would ratify the choice the president has made for them. But by taking it out of their hands and making the reduction in benefits mandatory, Bush hands the Democrats an argument that can slay his proposal.

For those who are on the lower end of the earnings spectrum, it is true that a choice between a cut in benefits or a rise in taxes is a choice of poisons. They cannot afford to live on what they now make and cannot save for retirement either. So the choice boils down to poverty now or poverty later.

But Bush could and should offer them the choice of postponing retirement to keep benefits at their current level. The savings added to the system that would come from a logical postponement of retirement would be important as a supplement to the amount saved by a cut in benefits to the well-off.



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By casting the issue as he has through his program of mandatory progressive indexation, Bush has ignored the history — and the mythology — of Social Security. When FDR first proposed the system, it was clearly a welfare program because there were no reserves in the system to pay for benefits to anybody. It was a simple transfer of money from one generation to the next — or, in this case, from borrowed money to the elderly. But Roosevelt embedded deeply in our culture and national psyche the concept that, in subsequent years, Social Security would be a universal savings plan, required by the government, in which each person saved for his or her retirement.

Of course, inflation has made a mockery of this idea. In reality, Social Security is not much more than an intergenerational transfer of income. The coming threat to the solvency of the system underscores this fact. When the earnings of the young drop, because of their decreased population, the elderly will suffer without a further subsidy.

Yet just because it isn’t true that Social Security is a savings program where people save for their own retirement doesn’t make it sacrosanct. The reason FDR conceived of the political justification for the program as he did was precisely so that the likes of George W.

Bush would have a hard time dismantling it. By giving everyone the impression that it was their own money coming back to them in benefits, he made it politically impractical to cast Social Security as the welfare program it really is.

Bush must be more respectful of the place of this myth in the minds of the voters. They will accept voluntary options in how to spend “their” money in the trust fund, but they will not let the president cast the program as one for the poor based on national largesse as opposed to a universal program whose foundation lies in the simple logic of giving people back their own money.

Bush cannot challenge the Rooseveltian legacy so overtly. It is only by giving people the choice of how to spend the money they think they have saved in the system that he can escape the attacks that would doom his program and would torpedo its more important contribution — that of a partial privatization of the system.

Bush needs to depart from the dogma of social engineering, where his academic panel decides what is good for people, and embrace his party’s historic commitment to individual choice, where people decide for themselves what they want their own future to be.

George W. Bush: Take it from a former Democrat — you have to become a better Republican!

Dick Morris was an adviser to Bill Clinton for 20 years. Look for Dick’s new book “Because He Could” about Bill Clinton. © 2005 Dick Morris, All Rights Reserved.

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