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NEWS

U. S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

SENATE REPUBLICAN LEADER

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WHAT GRIDLOCK?

DOLE DEFENDS RESPONSIBILITY OF CONGRESSIONAL REPUBLICANS:
MAJORITY OF AMERICANS LOOKING FOR ALTERNATIVES & POLITICAL
COMPETITION; 442 ITEMS PASS SENATE -- WHAT GRIDLOCK?

President Clinton made big headlines with his partisan attack this week on Congressional Republicans. He accused us of obstruction, delay, and yes, perpetuating the dreaded gridlock.

He even recycled the Democrats' favorite campaign gimmick, blaming all of America's woes on "the past twelve years", as if the Democratic tax and spend Congress was somehow on vacation "the past twelve years".

Well, I've got some news for the President. Whether he likes it or not, and whether he appreciates it or not, Republicans have cooperated with him in hundreds of ways. And we will continue to do so, as long as he proposes mainstream, commonsense legislation. But when he is pushing programs that tilt to the extreme, when he is demanding taxing and spending that is totally out of control, and when he is using political gimmicks to shift focus away from a liberal agenda, then the American people have a right to an alternative voice in Washington.

Let's face it, as much as the liberal cheerleaders in the media would like it, neither I nor any of my Republican colleagues were elected to be a rubber stamp for the President. When we have a basic philosophical difference, when we believe a program will be bad for America, we owe it to our constituents to speak up. After all, only 41% of the American people in a new poll approve of the President's performance. That leaves a big majority of the people who are looking for a responsible alternative to the Clinton agenda, people who are not interested in a one-party monopoly.

Candidate Clinton: "Momma Would Have Spanked Me"

It's kind of ironic that President Clinton would resort to blaming Congress, when during last year's campaign, he chastised President Bush for his attack on gridlock. On August 27, 1992, in San Antonio, candidate Clinton said: "The other thing the President did a great job of was blame Congress. ... 'It's all Congress' fault' Huh. If I'd have said stuff like that when I was a little boy, my momma would have spanked me. But he said, you know 'what do you expect me to do? I'm just the President of the United States. Those mean old people in Congress, they won't do anything. ...'" Again, that was candidate Bill Clinton, who as President Bill Clinton seems to like the Bush strategy of bashing his Congressional opponents after all.

The Mitchell Doctrine

Perhaps the best defense of the loyal opposition's responsibility was offered by a distinguished Senate leader. Let me quote him:

We can talk about various proposals. But I think it is a curious standard of bipartisanship that has been suggested here. The President insists that we adopt his plan. That is, according to the discussions recently held, not partisanship. [The other party] would like to see their plan adopted. That is called partisanship.

Why is it bipartisan for the President to demand that his plan be adopted, but partisan for [the other party] to demand that their plan be adopted? Do we live in a monarchy? Is the President a President, or is he a king?

(MORE)

Are we required by some law to accept whatever the President proposes without any opportunity for discussion, debate or suggestion of constructive alternatives? And if we so disagree with some aspect of the President's plan, if we believe it truly and sincerely harmful to the long-range interests of the country, are we somehow obligated to stand silent and adopt the President's plan lest we be accused of partisanship?

Now, that's not Bob Dole talking. It's not even a Republican. Those words were spoken by my distinguished friend from Maine, Senate Majority Leader George Mitchell, on February 18, 1992, when Republicans were fighting for President Bush's economic growth plan.

Republican Alternatives

And I find it amusing when the Vice President and others now accuse Republicans of sitting on the sidelines during the budget process. The fact is, Republicans have not been welcome at the all-Democrat taxathon that is producing the biggest tax increase ever. Every Republican economic alternative offered in the committee this year has been rejected on a party line vote. You won't find it in too many news articles by the liberal cheerleaders, but let the record show that Republicans, consistent with our responsibilities, offered a comprehensive alternative deficit reduction plan relying on spending cuts instead of tax increases. Democrats can dump on it all they want, but our plan was real, and offered genuine hope of getting the deficit under control. Unfortunately, Republicans were given the cold shoulder by the Administration, time after time, despite our public pleas for cooperation and bipartisanship.

What Gridlock? 442 Items Pass Senate

But, if the President, his Congressional allies, and his liberal media fan club want to hype-up the old gridlock gimmick, they ought to at least look at the facts. As of last night, the Senate had approved no fewer than 219 legislative measures, and approved 223 of the President's civilian nominees for Administration posts. Let me repeat -- Republicans have joined Democrats in passing 219 legislative matters so far this year. And we have joined Democrats in approving 223 Presidential nominees, including his entire cabinet. That doesn't sound like gridlock to me.

Meanwhile, as the President uses the gridlock gimmick, the appropriations bills are moving along at high speed. In fact, Senate Republicans even entered into an unusual agreement with our Democrat colleagues to limit amendments, and to have time agreements on all amendments to three crucial appropriations bills for the department of Agriculture, the Legislative Branch and the District of Columbia. The Majority Leader yesterday commented on how "extraordinary" the rapid action on the DC Appropriations bill was, adding how "promptly and effectively" the Senate was acting. That doesn't sound like gridlock to me.

More GOP Cooperation

Furthermore, Republicans are helping the President move other important nominations forward, including those for the Supreme Court and Director of the FBI. And when it comes to winning Congressional approval of the North American Free Trade Agreement, the President may find himself counting on more support from Republicans than members of his own majority party. That doesn't sound like gridlock to me.

So, I hope the President will join us, look at the facts, and understand how seriously we view our role in America's vigorous two-party system. Remember, Mr. President, 219 legislative matters have cleared the Senate, with our approval; 223 nominees, your nominees, have cleared the Senate, with our approval. That's not gridlock.

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Remarks delivered on Senate floor, approximately 10:50 AM EDT.