



messaging filibuster reform

first person politics

bringing you strategic insights backed by political psychology

Doing nothing won't fix our do-nothing Senate. That's why we can't rule out a rules change.

Connect: America needs a Senate that works, not one bound by rules and traditions that keep it from working.

Define: The 60-vote filibuster rule has brought Senate business to a halt. We're powerless to confirm even highly qualified public servants, as our Constitution requires.

Draw the Line: If Republicans won't let the Senate do its job, we can't rule out a rules change. Doing nothing isn't the answer when doing nothing is the problem.

Solution: When old traditions like the filibuster do more harm than good, we build new traditions. That's the American way.

Attack: If Democrats change the rules, Republicans will retaliate.

Contrast Republican extremism/partisanship with Democratic pragmatism/moderation:

We'd rather work with Republicans to find a set of rules both parties can live with. But radical threats like this just make a compromise harder to reach. Democrats believe the right approach is to reform the filibuster incrementally, not abolish it all at once. But sitting back and doing nothing won't fix our do-nothing Senate.

Attack: This is a power grab / an abuse of power that will kill the Senate.

Show how Republicans are abusing power and violating the Constitution:

It's the president's job to nominate public servants to make our government work. That's in the Constitution. What's NOT in the Constitution is a 60-vote requirement to confirm them. Republicans are abusing power by stopping the Senate from doing exactly what the Constitution requires.

Attack: Democrats are hypocrites – they've abused the filibuster too and opposed reforming it the last time.

Concede the pointless, backward-looking hypocrisy debate and focus on the present:

You're right. Both parties have misused the rules, and now the Senate is broken. We'd rather work with Republicans to find a set of rules both parties can live with. But if they won't let the Senate do its job, we can't rule out a rules change.

Attack: The president is picking nominees who will ram through his (environmental, regulatory, job-killing) agenda.

Pivot away from the distracting impacts debate, but address the unstated implication of corruption:

It's true that all nominees shape or implement the president's agenda. That's why presidents pick qualified people who share their philosophy. After all, if you wanted blue walls you wouldn't hire someone determined to paint them green. What the President's doing is no different, and it's no excuse for knee-jerk obstruction.

Attack: We can't change the rules because they protect minority rights.

Reframe the debate as a question of constitutional duties and obligations.

Voting on the president's nominees is part of the Senate's job, and the Constitution only requires a simple majority vote. If Republicans continue to abuse Senate traditions in order to blow off their constitutional obligations, we can't rule out a rules change.