

I applaud and commend, I repeat, on behalf of the entire Senate, the brilliant work done by these two fine gentlemen.

When we come back, I was hoping we would not have to have this vote on Monday, but it appears we are going to have to. We have two wars going on. One, as we know, Afghanistan, and one we cannot put out of our mind in Iraq. One of the great career senior foreign service officers whom we have had in recent years, Christopher R. Hill of Rhode Island, has been nominated by the President to be Ambassador to Iraq.

It is hard to comprehend, but I am going to have to file cloture on that tonight before we leave. I would hope everyone who is trying to hold up this man would give this some thought. How does this look? It does not look very good. But we are going to go ahead, and we are going to have this cloture vote on Monday. We have a lot of other things we could work on. We have a lot to do. We have a 5-week work period when we get back. I have already informed the Republican leader as to what days we are not going to have votes; there are three of them.

I hope everyone has a good 2 weeks. We have a lot of time we need to spend at home. We have not been home. These have been very long periods, two long work periods we have had since we have become a new Congress.

Of course, I have to say for all of us, it is very exiting to all of us to see the Presiding Officer.

The VICE PRESIDENT. The Senator from New Hampshire is recognized.

Mr. GREGG. Mr. President, I would like to take a minute to thank the majority leader and Republican leader for their assistance in helping us move this bill in a reasonably expeditious way, considering it is the budget.

I especially wish to thank the chairman and his staff, headed up by Mary Naylor. They do an extraordinary job. They are extremely professional and very courteous to the minority. It is always an open and fair process when we take up the budget, and they set an excellent standard.

I additionally wish to thank my staff, headed up by Cheri Reidy and Jim Hearn, Allison Parent, and they do a fabulous job. I also wish to thank the folks up there on the dais because they stay here all day and make sure we are in order and keeping things on the move and we thank them very much for their time.

Mr. BAUCUS. Mr. President, the chairman of the committee and the ranking member did such a wonderful job. I think we should all express our appreciation.

(Applause, Senators rising.)

The VICE PRESIDENT. The Senator from North Dakota.

Mr. CONRAD. Mr. President, I wish to thank all of our colleagues. This is a tough, difficult day for all of us. I think the Senate has conducted itself well and distinguished itself today.

I wish to thank each of our colleagues for that. I especially wish to thank Leader REID for his support throughout this process; Senator MURRAY, who I think has a special knack for convincing people not to offer amendments. Thank goodness for Senator MURRAY. To my colleague, Senator GREGG, you could not ask for a better partner. There is no one more professional, more decent or somebody whose word is better than Senator GREGG. I deeply appreciate it, as well as his professional staff, who have been terrific to work with.

On our side, Mary Naylor, my staff director; John Righter and Joel Friedman, my deputies; Joe Gaeta, Steve Bailey, Mike Jones, Jamie Morin, Stu Nagurka, Steve Posner, Sarah Kuehl, and all the others who have contributed.

This has been a labor of love. They have worked night and day, weekends for months, and I deeply appreciate their sacrifice.

The VICE PRESIDENT. The Republican leader.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, let me briefly echo the remarks of the majority leader and congratulate Chairman CONRAD and Ranking Member GREGG and say we have a lot of freshmen Senators. You probably think this is a tough day. I might mention to you, this is one of the least tough budget days we have had in the time that I have been here. I think I see the Vice President smiling. He would agree with that.

That is a tribute largely to Senator GREGG and Senator CONRAD. Thank you so much for an excellent job.

The VICE PRESIDENT. The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KERRY. Mr. President, I wish to make a plea, if I can publicly. There is still time between now and tomorrow to try to do something differently on this question of sending our Ambassador to Iraq.

Senator LUGAR is supportive. I am supportive. There is bipartisan support for this nominee. He is going to be approved. We all know that. Iraq is experiencing increasing political difficulties, and the missing ingredient of our capacity to get the success we want is political reconciliation.

Ambassador Crocker has not been well recently. He has put enormous energy in this effort. Getting Christopher Hill there in the next 2 weeks can make a difference. I would urge our colleagues, if there are other issues linked to this, there are other ways to work it through.

My hope would be that we would be able to free him up. It is a terrible message to send, to tie him to issues of North Korea or otherwise extraneous. It handicaps our capacity to maximize our efforts in a war.

If we are going to treat a war seriously, we ought to treat this Ambassador nomination seriously. I would ask my colleagues to think about that while there is an opportunity to be able to approve it in these next 24 hours.

Mr. ENSIGN. Mr. President, I hate to throw a little cold water on this whole "Kumbaya" party we are having, but I think it is an important precedent that we determine tonight.

I rise to make a parliamentary inquiry regarding the status of the budget resolution: Specifically, I rise to inquire if the resolution remains a privileged measure, notwithstanding the adoption of 10 corrosive points of order, 8 of which reach into the jurisdiction of the Finance Committee, 1 of which reaches into the Veterans' Committee, and 1 into the Judiciary Committee.

In the case of the Durbin amendment, No. 974, the point of order specifies, with exacting detail, what level of taxpayer must receive a tax cut in order to allow death taxes to go forward.

Therefore, I put the question to the Chair: Does the pending budget resolution retain its privileged status despite these corrosive points of order having been adopted?

The VICE PRESIDENT. It does.

Mr. ENSIGN. Further parliamentary inquiry: Does that mean it would require 60 votes for passage?

The VICE PRESIDENT. It does not require 60 votes for passage.

Mr. ENSIGN. Further parliamentary inquiry: Is losing its privileged status at this point, does that mean it would be still fully debatable?

The VICE PRESIDENT. It has not lost its privileged status.

Mr. ENSIGN. So that would be the precedent for the future, 8 to 10 corrosive amendments does not lose its privileged status.

The VICE PRESIDENT. This particular budget resolution has not lost its privileged status.

Mr. ENSIGN. I thank the Chair.

The VICE PRESIDENT. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. BROWNBACK. Mr. President, to briefly respond to the Senator from Massachusetts, the chairman of the distinguished Foreign Relations Committee has raised a serious issue about Ambassador Hill.

A number of us on our side have serious questions about Ambassador Hill and how he conducted himself in the last assignment. I would like to see what some of those instructions were from that assignment.

I recognize the seriousness of the situation we are in in Iraq, no question about that. But I have serious reservations about his position in going to that. I think this will be a good period of time for us to get some of these questions answered from the State Department.

I have proffered a letter to them. I have some serious questions about what took place during the negotiations with North Korea and a possible missile launch that will take place even in this interim, and this was our lead negotiator there.

For those reasons, I, amongst others, am raising questions at this time. I think they need to be answered before