

From: Marge Baker, People For the American Way

To: Interested Parties

Date: December 23, 2009

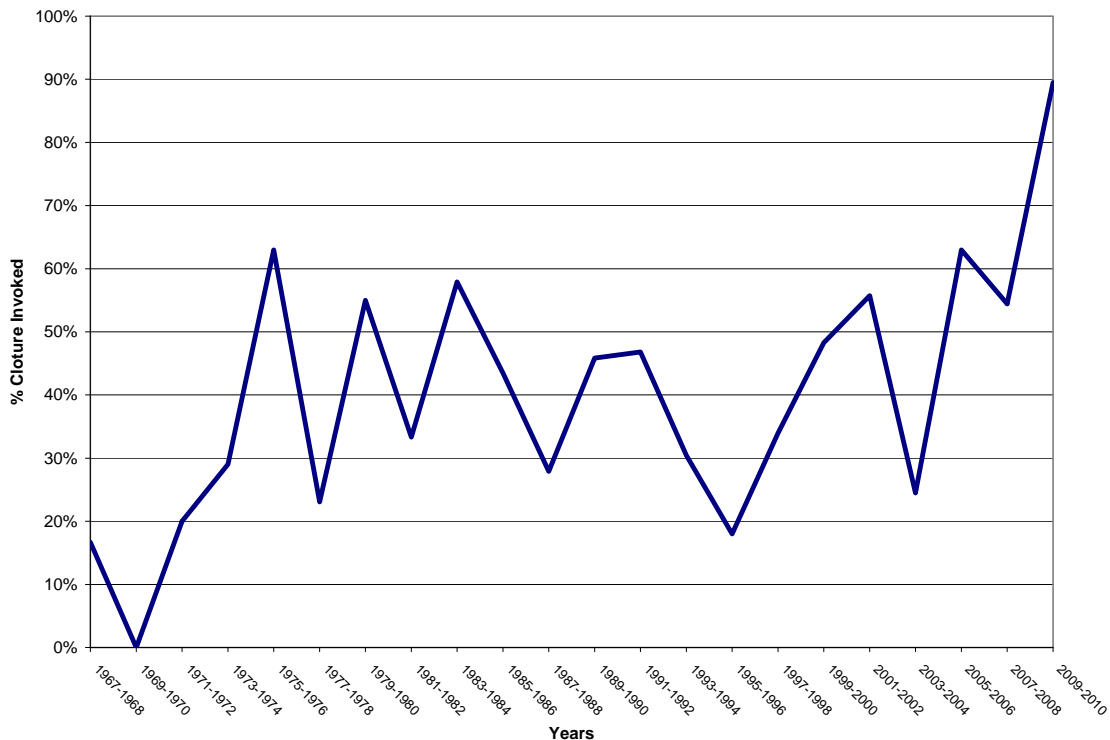
Re: The Numbers Don't Lie--GOP Obstruction Efforts Unprecedented in Senate

If it has seemed that Republican Senators have been expending tremendous amounts of energy for the sole purpose of slowing down the work of the Senate and the President's reform agenda, that's because they have.

A review of cloture attempts in past sessions of Congress reveals that Republican senators have gone to record lengths to use Senate rules with the goal of slowing down the work of Congress, often when they have no expectation of stopping legislation or even winning concessions.

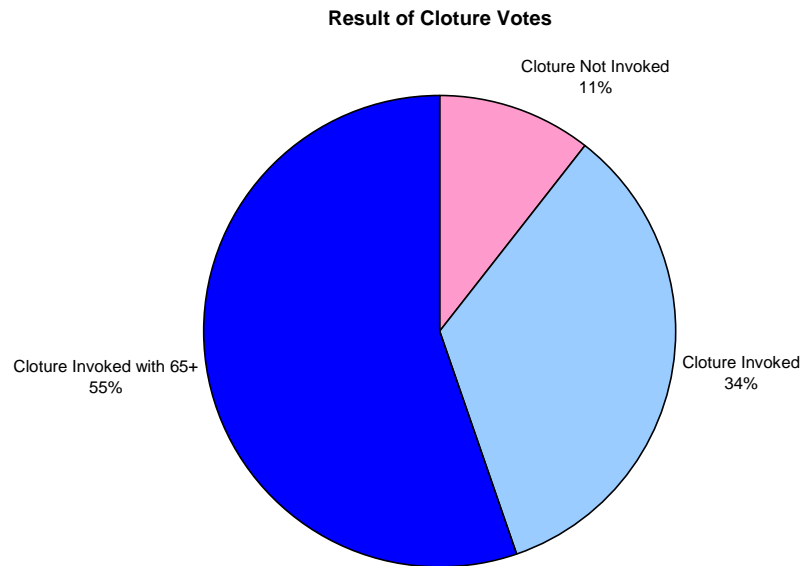
So far, GOP foot dragging has forced the Senate leadership to file 67 cloture petitions and forced cloture votes on 38 occasions¹. Those numbers, while high, aren't yet on pace to break the record set by the GOP in the last Congress of 139 motions filed and 112 forced votes. But what is remarkable is that, of those 38 votes forced this year, cloture was invoked 34 times.

That means a full 89% of the time, the cloture vote did nothing but delay the inevitable—a huge increase from the previous high of 56%.



¹ In 29 instances, cloture motions were withdrawn or otherwise not voted on. Even in these cases, cloture filings represent intransigence on the part of GOP leaders who could otherwise consent to end debate at a mutually agreed upon time.

Moreover many of these votes didn't just fail: they failed by such significant margins that no one, especially not an experienced vote counter like Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, could possibly have expected they could actually pass. In fact, in a majority of cases, 65 or more Senators voted to cut off debate. In several cases the number reached into the seventies and eighties, and in one case 97 Senators voted in favor of cloture, but not before the maneuver chewed up valuable time.



Far from being a meaningless exercise, this effort to force unnecessary cloture votes has wasted an enormous amount of time. After cloture is filed it takes up to two days before Senate rules allow a vote on the petition. Then, Senate rules permit the Republicans to insist on an additional 30 hours of post-cloture debate. That means even when only a small minority of Senators actually oppose cloture, they have the ability to chew up days of the Senate's time.

In 2010, the Senate will likely consider legislation addressing health care, global warming, the economy, immigration, and workers' rights in addition to its obligation to confirm Supreme Court Justices, members of the federal bench and crucial administration officials. There's plenty of work to be done, and time is already tight without needless intentional delay.

The Republican Senators should stop trying to grind the Senate to a halt and start working on the issues that Americans elected them to address.

###