

## Farewell to the Senate

Mr. COBURN. Mr. President, following in the traditions of the Senate, I come to the floor to speak about my experience in the Senate. Unfortunately, this will not be the last time I speak, much to the chagrin of many of you, as I have some adamant opposition to some of the things we are doing.

But I nevertheless will try to put in context some of my feelings and thoughts about the great privilege that has been granted to me by the people of Oklahoma. We hear a lot of speeches in this place. As Members who are elected, it gets reflected on us, but nothing could be further from the truth. Because the things that really make this place operate are the people who work with us, the people who support us, the people who help guide us, the people behind the scenes who are both brilliant and committed and dedicated to the founding principles of this country.

We all have them working for us. Yet they are rarely recognized. So whether our accomplishments are big or small, those accomplishments come through the work, efforts, and labors of those who join with us as we come here to try to make a difference. So I first wanted to say there are a lot of people I need to say thank you to; from our Parliamentarian Elizabeth to all of the staff who work in the Senate, to the people who work at GAO, wonderful people, CRS, the IGs, legislative counsel -- they have written thousands, I mean literally thousands of amendments for me. They probably are going to have some real mixed feelings about my departure.

Then I have personal staff, one of whom -- all tremendous -- but one of whom I found to be a phenomenal, brilliant person. His name is Roland Foster. There is not anything he has ever forgotten. You can ask him anything. He will find it. He knows it. So I mention him. I have hundreds of others whom I could equally speak about, from my former chief of staff

Mike Schwartz, who passed away from Lou Gehrig's disease, to those in my office and staff who each knows what a difference they make -- they did -- the cloakroom staff and the help we get from Laura Dove and David Schiappa and Mr. Duncan on our side -- same on the opposite side. We are only able to function because of all of the people who enable us to do that. So with those thank-yous, I actually wanted to move to a different topic. The topic is believing in our country. I tell people wherever I go: We do not have one problem we cannot solve. There is nothing too big for us. They are all solvable.

To prove that is my chairman, Tom Carper, on homeland security. He has been a phenomenal chairman. He is not in my party. We do not agree on everything, but the one thing we agreed on was that we were going to work together to solve problems. We have. We did not solve them all, but I would suggest if we look at what has come through this place, even in this dysfunctional place at this time, we will

see more coming out under his leadership than any other pieces of legislation. Why is that? It is because the focus was not about him, it was not about me, it was about solving the problems of our country.

To those of you through the years whom I have offended, I truly apologize. I think none of that was intended because I actually see things differently. You see, I believe our Founders were absolutely brilliant, far smarter than we are. I believe the enumerated powers meant something. They were meant to protect us against what history says always happens to a Republic. They have all died. They have all died.

So the question is, What will happen with us? Can we cheat history? Can we do something better than was done in the past? I honestly believe we can, but I do not believe we can if we continue to ignore the wisdom of our founding documents. So when I have offended, I believe it has been on the basis of my belief in article I,

section 8. I think we can stuff that genie back into the bottle.

E pluribus unum. "Out of many, one." But you do not have one unless you have guaranteed the liberty of the many. When we ignore what the Constitution gave us as a guideline, to protect the individual liberties, to limit the size and scope of the Federal Government so the benefits of freedom and liberty can be expressed all across this land, that is when we get back to solving our problems.

I think about my father -- he had a fifth-grade education -- a great believer in our country. He would not recognize it today. The loss of freedom we have imposed by the arrogance of an all-too-powerful Federal Government, ignoring the wisdom and writing of our Founders that said: Above all, we must protect the liberty of the individual and recognize that liberty is given as a God-given right.

So my criticism isn't directed personally, it is because I truly believe that freedom gains us more than anything we

can plan here. I know not everybody agrees with me, but the one thing I do know is that our Founders agreed with me.

They had studied this process before. They know what happens when you dominate from a central government. This didn't mean intentions are bad; the intentions are great. The motivations of people in this body are wonderful, but the perspective on how we do it and what the long-term consequences are of how we do it really do matter.

We see ourselves today with a President whom we need to be supporting and praying for, with an economy that is not doing what it could be doing, and we need to be asking the question, Why? Is there a fundamental reason? And there is.

We are too much involved in the decisionmaking in the economy in this country that inhibits the flow of capital to the best return, which inhibits the growth of wealth, which leaves us at a standard of living the same as what we had

in 1988. That is where we are, yet it doesn't have to be that way.

I am going to read some words we have all heard before, but they are worth rereading.

WE hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights...

All of us.

...that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness --

I look at legislation and say how does that have an impact on those two things, and too often it has a negative impact.

...That to secure these Rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just Powers from the Consent of the Governed, that whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these Ends, it is the right of the People to alter or abolish it.

I don't know where we are on that continuum, but I know we are not where we were intended to be in the vision of our

Founders, and we are suffering, no matter where you are in the country, as a consequence.

We established the Constitution to try to protect those rights and to delineate those rights. We put in the limitation of the government and outlined the rights of each individual citizen upon which the government shall not infringe. Yet what comes out of this body and this Congress every day, to my chagrin, infringes those guaranteed rights.

Every Member of the Senate takes the same oath and this is where I differ with a lot of colleagues. Let me read the oath, because I think it is part of the problem.

I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the

office on which I am about to enter: So help me God.

Your State isn't mentioned one time in that oath. Your whole goal is to protect the United States of America, its Constitution and its liberties. It is not to provide benefits for your State. That is where we differ. That is where my conflict with my colleagues has come. It is nice to be able to do things for your State, but that isn't our charge. Our charge is to protect the future of our country by upholding the Constitution and ensuring the liberty that is guaranteed there is protected and preserved.

The magic number in the Senate is not 60, the number of Senators needed to end debate, and it is not 51, a majority. The most important number in the Senate is one -- one Senator. That is how it was set up. That is how our Founders designed it, and with that comes tremendous amounts of responsibility, because the Senate has a set of rules or at least that gives each

individual Member the power needed to advance, change, or stop legislation. That is a tool that has to be mentored and refined and wise in its application.

Most of the bills that pass the Senate never receive a vote. We all know that. It is a vast majority of the bills. They are approved by unanimous consent. It only takes a single Senator to withhold consent to stop most legislation.

There are many other rules and procedures a Member can use. They are often referred to as arcane, but that is only because they are rarely used. They are not arcane. They were designed to protect liberty, to secure liberty, to make sure that we don't all follow history and fail.

Every Senator has the power to introduce legislation and, until recently, offer amendments.

No single Senator should be allowed to decide what the rights of another Senator should be. That is tyranny. It has

nothing to do with the history and classics of the Senate.

To exercise the rights we have been entrusted with, we must respect the rights of others. That is the true power of our Constitution. That is also the true power of the Senate. It is what binds our Nation together, and it is what is needed to make the Senate work properly again.

The Senate was designed uniquely to force compromise, not to force gridlock -- to force compromise. One Senator had the power to stop everything for the first 100 years, but it didn't because compromise was the goal.

Our Founders understood there were many differences between the States -- in size, geography, economy, and opinions.

They united the States as one country based upon the premise that the many are more powerful than the one. As Senators, we have to follow this example. I have not always done that; I admit that freely to you. I should have. As Senators, we must follow the example, stand for our

principles, but working to find those areas of agreement where compromise can be found to unite and move our country forward. My colleague Senator Carper has my admiration because he has worked tirelessly the past 2 years to try to accomplish that.

Not all of the powers of the Senators are exercised on the Senate floor. Each Member of the Senate has a unique role to participate and practice oversight, to hold the government accountable, and that is part of our duties, except most often that is the part of our duties that is most ignored.

To know how to reach a destination, you must first know where you are, and without oversight -- effective, vigorous oversight -- you will never solve anything. You cannot write a bill to fix an agency unless you have an understanding of the problem, and you can only know this by conducting oversight, asking the tough questions, holding the bureaucrats accountable, find out what works and what

doesn't, and know what has already been done.

Effective oversight is an effective tool to expose government overreach and wasteful spending, but it also markedly exposes where we lose our liberty and our essential freedoms.

I have had some fun through the years, taken some criticism for the waste vote -- and it is opinion, I agree. Everybody who has seen the waste book has a great defense of why it is there. But the real question is will we become efficient at how we spend the money of the American people? This is a big enterprise. There is no other enterprise anywhere close to it in size in the world. It is not manageable unless we all try to agree to manage it and have the knowledge of it.

I think there ought to be 535 voice votes every year, and then we ought to have the debate about where we are not spending money wisely and have the information at our fingertips so we make great decisions because, quite frankly, we don't make great

decisions because we don't have the knowledge. Then what knowledge we do have we transfer to a bureaucracy to make decisions about it when we should have been guiding those things.

True debates about national priorities would come about if we did effective oversight. It is the Senate, once hailed as the world's greatest deliberative body, where these differences should be argued. Our differences should be resolved through civil discourse so they are not settled in the street.

Just as the Constitution provides for majority rule and our democracy while protecting the rights of the individual, the Senate must return to the principles to bring trust of the electorate, and it can. Our Founders believed that protecting the minority views and minority rights in the Senate was essential to having a bicameral legislature that would give us balance and not move too quickly against the very fundamental principles upon which this country was based -- and not out of

guessing, but out of thorough knowledge of what had happened in the past. We have to be very careful to guard both minority rights and the rule of law.

There is no one who works in the Senate who is insignificant, whether it is the people who serve us when we have lunch, to the highest of the high. They all deserve our ear. Each of us has value.

I would end with one final comment. The greatest power I have not used as a Senator, which I would encourage you to use in the future, is the power of convening. You have tremendous power to pull people together because of your position.

To convene the opposite opinions -- Chuck Schumer has been great at that for me. When we have a difference, he wants to get together, convene, and see how we work.

That power is the power that causes us to compromise, to come together, to reach consensus. So my encouragement to you is to rethink the utilization of the power of

convening. People will come to you if you ask them to come.

Again, I end by saying a great thank you to my family for their sacrifice, a great thank you to the wonderful staff I have, and a thank you to each of you for the privilege of having been able to work for a better country for us all.

I yield the floor.

(Applause.)