



**National  
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**To Be Equal #48**

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**Senate Disarms Weapon of Mass Obstruction**

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*“For the first time in history, Republicans have routinely used the filibuster to prevent President Obama from appointing his executive team or confirming judges...The change we propose today would ensure executive and judicial nominees get an up or down vote on confirmation – yes or no.”* Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid

Last week, the United States Senate took a highly controversial but much-needed step to end the abuse of the filibuster and ensure that nominees to executive branch appointments and federal judgeships can be confirmed by a simple majority vote. By a 52-48 vote last Thursday, the Senate limited a longstanding filibuster procedure that has been used to block an unprecedented number of President Obama's appointments and turned “advise and consent” into “deny and obstruct” over the last five years.

The National Urban League applauds this historic action and hopes that it clears the way for a final vote to allow a number of highly qualified Americans to serve their country. This includes the three judges the President recently picked to fill vacancies on the D.C. Court of Appeals and Representative Melvin Watt, a 20-year member of the House Financial Services Committee and former Chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, who was nominated in May to be Director of the Federal Housing Finance Agency. Prior to last week's change in Senate rules, Watt was virtually assured of becoming the first sitting Member of Congress since 1843 to be rejected for a Cabinet-level appointment. Mel Watt and several other stellar candidates would also bring much-needed diversity to their roles at a time when people of color and women continue to face obstacles to equal justice and suffer disproportionately from the housing crisis. It is clear; these nominees were being blocked solely on the basis of partisanship and ideology, not their qualifications.

Partisan gridlock and obstructionism have risen to new heights since President Obama first took office almost five years ago. The minority party in the Senate and the majority party in the House have gone to extraordinary lengths to thwart the President's legislative priorities. And his nominees for executive branch positions and judgeships have been

repeatedly stonewalled. As Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid reminded us last week, "In the history of the Republic, there have been 168 filibusters of executive and judicial nominations. Half of them have occurred during the Obama Administration – during the last four and a half years. These nominees deserve at least an up-or-down vote. But Republican filibusters deny them a fair vote and deny the President his team."

The outrageous filibuster blockade that has left so many important federal positions vacant in recent months has not only been harmful to the President, it has been a gross disservice to the American people. Well aware of that fact, President Obama responded to the Senate's action by saying, "It's no secret that the American people have probably never been more frustrated with Washington. And one of the reasons why that is, is that over the past five years, we've seen an unprecedented pattern of obstruction in Congress that's prevented too much of the American people's business from getting done...So I support the step the majority of senators today took to change the way that Washington is doing business." So do we. Rather than being used as it was originally intended, as a tool of last resort on matters of principle, in recent years, the filibuster has been used for purely political ends. That is why disarming this weapon of mass obstruction was the right thing to do.

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