



Senator Coons meets with SCOTUS nominee

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President Barack Obama accused Senate Republicans on Thursday of jeopardizing the “integrity of the judicial branch” by refusing to consider his “extraordinary” nominee to the Supreme Court. Now, in meeting after Senate meeting, he smiles stiffly and utters pleasantries, if anything at all, while cameras focus in.

The Senate rejected President Ronald Reagan’s nomination of Judge Robert Bork to the Supreme Court in 1987 on a 42-58 vote, after a notoriously contentious debate. Two weeks ago when we left Washington to go back to our home states, there were only two of us to announce we were willing to meet with Judge Garland.

But Republican Senate leader Mitch McConnell has made clear the Senate should wait for the next president to make an appointment before hearings to confirm a nominee are held, essentially freezing Garland’s nomination in place.

That support won’t matter much unless senate Republicans relent on their vows to block any nomination from President Obama after conservative Justice Antonin Scalia died in February. They do that by meeting with him/her and by viewing his/her answers to the committee’s detailed questionnaire.

A day earlier, the routine was a bit more awkward. A recent Monmouth University poll found that almost seven in 10 Americans think the Senate should hold hearings on Garland. In a memo circulated Wednesday, the junior senator from Highland Park said he “had a positive conversation” with the Lincolnwood native and urged his fellow Republican colleagues to do the same.

During Garland’s visit with Minnesota Sen.

“It was really fun and I missed it”, he joked. Garland nodded silently, keeping his smile steady for the cameras.

According to the White House, Garland will meet next week with additional Republican senators, including Kelly Ayotte of New Hampshire, Rob Portman of Ohio, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, Jeff Flake of Arizona, and Chuck Grassley of Iowa, who chairs the Judiciary Committee. He saves his comments for private questioning from senators, a few of whom have revealed his reactions to the process. “It’s natural for some member of the public to think you must be identified in a particular way as a result of that process”.

A week later, Garland is more of a seasoned pro. “Which I’m sure will be very popular. What’s not acceptable, I believe, is the increasing use of the filibuster for someone who’s clearly within the mainstream”, Obama said.

If Republicans have their way, Garland’s grind will be for nothing.

McConnell, who has repeatedly said Garland would not get a confirmation vote, took to the floor to again praise Grassley and criticize Obama ahead of his remarks. Former White House advisor David Axelrod called it a risky move by Republicans who could lose their majority in the fall.

Roger Pilon, vice president for legal affairs for the Cato Institute, a libertarian research group, said the fact that Obama’s opposition did not come in an election year, like this one, makes the actions worse.

So what happens to Garland’s nomination from here?

Grassley says he plans to buy the Judge Garland breakfast next week. Given the overwhelming pressure they are facing from constituents, GOP senators would be foolish not to walk away from the embarrassing argument that they don’t need to do their jobs as elected officials.