

# NATIONAL REVIEW

## **‘I Want It Now’ Politics Are Not the American Way**

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Even some Republicans are too anxious to “get things done.” For children, “I want it now” is a common refrain. The understanding that instant gratification is not always possible (or desirable) takes time to develop. But we are expected to outgrow our childish impatience.

Increasingly, politicians and voters on both the left and the right appear to have forgotten this lesson.

Thus, we see liberal columnists like Tom Friedman lamenting that the U.S. is not more like China, where the forces of progress “can just impose the politically difficult but critically important policies needed to move a society forward in the 21st century.” Or Paul Krugman suggesting that the president simply ignore Congress’s failure to pass a debt-ceiling increase.

President Obama, with his pen-and-phone strategy has been one of the biggest practitioners of “want it now” politics. You can’t get Republicans to make changes to Obamacare? Just rewrite it yourself. Congress won’t pass immigration reform? Simply stop enforcing the law. No two-thirds majority for your Iran deal? Do it as an executive agreement. No need to deal with the slow, messy, and difficult process of governing.

Governing, as George W. Bush once reminded us, is “hard work.” It was meant to be. It requires building coalitions, securing public support, and making deals with people you don’t agree with or even like. It often means settling for half a loaf.

The founders set up a system, with its competing power centers and multiple checks and balances, designed to make passing laws difficult. It was designed not to “get things done,” but to cool the passions of the moment.

Some of the worst legislation of the last few years, such as TARP, resulted from the impulse to do something — anything — right now. Some of the worst legislation of the last few years, such as TARP, resulted from the impulse to do something — anything — right now. We would hardly have been better off if President Obama had found it even easier to enact his agenda.

Sadly, conservatives too seem to have given in to the “I want it now” impulse. We see it in Donald Trump’s appeal to get things done. Trump often sounds as if he would rule like a combination of Putin and Hugo Chávez, issuing decrees — the best and greatest decrees, no doubt — and expecting things to happen.

Other candidates, too, continually promise things that they know they can't deliver. No matter what a candidate says, the next president is not going to tear up the Iran treaty on day one. Obamacare is not going to be repealed without a Republican president and a filibuster-proof Senate majority.

This syndrome also explains some of the grass-roots anger toward John Boehner and Mitch McConnell. Republican voters are upset that GOP majorities have not been able to force through their agenda over Democratic filibusters and the threat of an Obama veto. But given the structure of our government and Senate rules, Republicans were never going to get everything they wanted.

This is not a brief for Boehner or McConnell, who have raised incompetence to an art form. One wishes that McConnell fought as hard for, say, entitlement reform as he has fought to try to save the Export-Import bank. And the GOP leadership's open display of contempt for the more conservative members of its caucus was hardly a strategy for governing. But it is silly to suggest that Republicans could have stopped the Iran deal or repealed Obamacare if only Boehner and McConnell had been willing to "fight."

When Democrats were in control of the Senate, they were the ones complaining about Republican "obstructionism." Imagine what the Democrats might have pushed through without the filibuster. Card check? The "public option" for Obamacare? Cap-and-trade? More taxes and more spending?

Yes, Harry Reid did employ the "nuclear option" to eliminate the filibuster for judicial nominations, but that actually accomplished relatively little. It is also a precedent that will almost certainly come back to bite the Democrats.

Now that Republicans have regained the majority, the shoe is in the other foot, and they are the ones calling for changes to the rules. But if they abolish the filibuster now, what will happen when the Democrats regain control? Are the voters prepared for the consequences when Democrats are the ones "getting it done"?

And even if the filibuster were repealed, Republicans lack the two-thirds majority necessary to override a presidential veto. Republicans would be giving up their ability to block future Democratic initiatives in exchange for the symbolic and cathartic experience of forcing the president to cast a veto.

Our system of government is slow, annoying, and frustrating. It makes it very hard for voters to get what they want. That's probably a good thing.

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