

## You Might Be Right - Filibuster - Transcript

**Marianne Wanamaker:** Welcome to You Might Be Right, a place for civil conversations about tough topics. Brought to you by the Howard H. Baker Jr. Center for Public Policy at the University of Tennessee.

In this episode, our hosts, former Tennessee governors Bill Haslam and Phil Bredesen and their guests discuss the filibuster. The filibuster prevents legislation and key nominations from advancing without a vote of 60 senators to end debate, and it is a long standing practice of the United States Senate.

Is the filibuster a needed tool to protect political minorities and promote compromise, or does it lead to stagnation and obstruction and permit a minority to rule the chamber without a national mandate? This episode was recorded live at the Baker Center in Knoxville, Tennessee in September 2022.

**Bill Haslam:** Pleasure to have our two guests, and let me go first and introduce Lamar Alexander. If you make a list of the great Tennesseans, it is no exaggeration at all to say that Lamar Alexander would be on that list. Two time governor, three time senator, secretary of education for the country, president of the University of Tennessee. Ran once or twice for president of the United States, but somebody who's contributed in numerable ways.

Lamar is a thoughtful person that, in my life, literally has helped guide me and lead me in so many ways, so Lamar, thank you for being a part of this discussion.

**Phil Bredesen:** Great, and I'd like to take the opportunity to introduce Bob Corker, a man who I admire tremendously and consider a friend, and someone who's had a very productive career in both the business world and in the world of public service, both areas where I admire what you've accomplished. Accomplished very much.

Bob started out as an entrepreneur in Chattanooga, in the building and commercial real estate world, became the Mayor of Chattanooga after he served, oh. I guess about four or five years as the commissioner of finance and administration, where I first got to know him, was elected to the Senate in 2007 and served with great distinctions there, ending up as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, and someone who I think really helped things on an even keel there. It's a great pleasure to have you here, Bob. Proud to know you.

**Bill Haslam:** Maybe we should start, since we're at the Howard Baker Center and this is part of the Baker Center podcast. Lamar, I know you knew Howard very well. You gave the eulogy at his funeral. I'd love just any quick reflections you could give us on Senator Baker.

**Lamar Alexander:** Thanks Bill and Phil, and thanks to the leadership here at UT, to Randy Boyd, Dondy Plowman, Marianne Wanamaker, for turning the Howard Baker Center into

something really exciting right now. I'm delighted to see that. Here's the Howard Baker story.

In November of 1980, there was a political earthquake in the country. Ronald Reagan was elected president, but that wasn't the earthquake. The earthquake was that the United States Senate went from 39 Republicans to 53 Republicans, if I'm remembering right, and suddenly the imperious Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia was not the leader of the Senate anymore. He was the minority leader. Howard Baker, who was the Republican leader of the Senate, was the majority leader.

Senator Baker walked from his office in the capital the day after the election, which was two rooms that was the Republican leader's office, that's all the Democrats would give them, to Senator Byrd's office, the Democratic leader's office, which was a huge room with a lot of other rooms around it. He goes in to Senator Byrd and says, "Senator Byrd," who's in a state of shock, "I wonder if you'd do me a favor." "What's that Howard?" "I wonder if you would mind if I kept my office and you kept yours."

There was this long silence, and Byrd said, "Well, okay Howard. Of course. I'd be glad to do that." Then he said, "There's another favor I'd like to ask in terms of the way we work with each other. I won't surprise you, if you won't surprise me. I'll never know the Senate rules as well as you do." And Byrd said, "Let me think about it." The next morning, Byrd said yes, and they worked together for eight years that way.

Four years before that, Howard had been the Republican leader, Byrd the majority leader. The next four years, Howard was the majority leader. During that period of time, they worked together when Howard was the minority leader to ratify the Panama Canal Treaty. David McCullough, who wrote this wonderful book about the Panama Canal, told me that both Byrd and Baker told him that they read McCullough's book, each changed his mind about the treaty, and then they worked together to get 67 votes in a very difficult, unpopular environment. That was the Howard Baker I knew.

**Bob Corker:** Well, first of all, I'm glad to be with these new podcast phenomenon.

**Bill Haslam:** We're such a young, hip crowd.

**Bob Corker:** I admire what they've done, and I think I will say my relationship with Phil Bredesen is that seeing what he did in Nashville encouraged me to be Mayor of Chattanooga.

**Phil Bredesen:** It just started you off on that whole career.

**Bob Corker:** Yeah, you started everybody off, it seems. Glad to be here with the outstanding leadership we have here at UT. I'm so happy and proud of what has happened here, and thank you for building this into something, Marianne, that's even more important to people across our state and now, it seems, our country. Always great to be with my good friend and senior senator,

Lamar Alexander, who was wonderful, and to me, was very much in the Howard Baker mold, if you will, and as everyone knows, he worked with him for many years.

I knew him later in life, and I really got to know him in the campaign that began in 2004 and had always admired him. His graciousness, his... There was something about him that just drew you to him, and I didn't have those personal experiences. He had a way, too, by the way, of getting a message across to you when maybe you thought you ought to be doing something slightly different. With a smile, but you were very encouraged to move in the direction that he wanted you to move.

He was beloved. Again, I was so thankful that he was at my swearing in, one of the great honors, and again, this is a great way to honor of the great senators of all times. Thank you for letting me be a part of it.

**Bill Haslam:** Let's start out, put it in normal people's language, the filibuster. We're here to talk about the pros and cons of it. No matter what side you're on, what big issue comes up, it gets stuck and one side says, "Let's do away with the filibuster." What is it, and how does it work?

**Lamar Alexander:** Well, it's the right to talk your head off. If you go back to "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington" with Jimmy Stewart, that movie, that's what he says. But here's a better example of it. At Senator Baker's funeral, the minister at the Huntsville Presbyterian Church told a story of a meeting of the elders of the church. Howard was an elder, and they were having a meeting about whether to... It was \$300 to paint the pews, and there was a big debate about it.

Howard sat through the whole thing and finally they resolved it. Afterwards, the minister said to Howard, "Senator Baker, you're a busy man. You could've wrote a check for \$300 and gone and done other things." He said, "I could've, but I thought it was important that we keep talking until we came up with a result that almost everybody could live with."

Now that's what the filibuster's about. The filibuster's very simple. It simply says to pass an important bill in the United States Senate, you have to get 60 people who agree out of 100. It's time to stop talking and vote. They won't stop talking until it forces a result that most senators can vote for, and therefore, most of the country can live with. Takes a long time to do that sometimes, but most issues ought to be decided by the state legislature, the governor.

These are for these great big national issues that divide the country, and it's important that we have an institution that helps unify the country. If you don't have the requirement that you have more than the majority to decide, you have what de Tocqueville described in his book, Democracy in America, when he identified the two greatest threats to our country in its infancy was one, Russia, and two, was the tyranny of the majority. The filibuster avoids the tyranny of the majority.

**Bob Corker:** I have a very different description. That might've been true in the movie, but

actually, a filibuster is one senator. One senator standing up and saying they object. Nothing having to do with talking. Nothing. It's evolved. When I first got to the Senate, I was elected in '06 and took office January 3rd, the filibuster was used much less than it is today.

What happened was, the outside groups that score senators on how they vote learned that, instead of scoring people on the final vote on the bill, let's begin scoring people on the cloture vote. So what happened is, both sides of the aisle started using the 60 vote threshold, really not to negotiate, not to conciliate, not to work out a piece of legislation, but to block legislation.

I have a very different view of what the filibuster is used for. Let's face it. There are so many legislative days that exist in a year, and what the minority uses a filibuster to do today is to burn up those legislative days to make sure that the other side doesn't have as much opportunity to move legislation during the time they're there, or to nominate people to courts or other positions.

By the way, the filibuster, think about Clarence Thomas in 1991. Democrats were not fond of Clarence Thomas. This happened on both sides of the aisle. But he was confirmed by a 52/48 vote without a cloture vote. It's changed dramatically, and I think, as we describe the filibuster today, it's a revisionist description that's revised, sure. Those of us in the minority today would be the case, we love the filibuster because it means that something that we really oppose cannot happen.

But it's really being used in a way that was never intended to be used. It was only used in rare circumstances, and it was to end debate. It was to make sure that there'd been enough time. Robert's Rules of Orders, you can call for a vote at any time. What it did originally was to prevent that from happening, to make sure that people had enough time to discuss the issue, and that a vote wasn't called prematurely. That was the intent of the filibuster, and it's been totally used in a different way now, and that's why there's so much frustration about it.

**Lamar Alexander:** I can give you a little different view on that. I would agree with Bob that we-

**Bill Haslam:** Hey Phil, you and I can go to get some coffee if you want.

**Phil Bredesen:** Let's go get a coffee.

**Lamar Alexander:** Well, just so we understand what we're talking about here, the filibuster has always been used to kill legislation. Always. And your tactic is that if you can't come up with something that most of us can agree with, we're not going to pass it. I'll give you an example. In the 1960s, President Johnson wanted to abolish all state right to work laws with a national open shop law.

Senator Dirksen, who was the Republican leader, toured the country and said, "I'm going to filibuster. We're going to talk and talk and talk, and we're going to kill this legislation and it's not going to pass." And it didn't. It's always been used for that reason.

Where I would agree with Bob is that, on many routine occasions especially, senators have accommodated voting on amendments, taking bills up, and then having a final vote at 60. You've got into a long period of delay. The Senate operates by motions and unanimous consent. If you listen carefully, the majority leader says, "I ask consent, that means unanimous consent, to bring up the Corker bill." And if Rand Paul is in a bad mood, he objects, and that means-

**Bob Corker:** Or in a good mood. It doesn't matter.

**Lamar Alexander:** He objects, so the leader may file what's called a motion to cut off debate, that's cloture, and under the Senate rules you have to go to Wednesday before you vote on it, and then you have to go to Thursday before you have a final vote on it. So I would say, keep the filibuster and reduce the delay. I've got some ideas about how to do that, but don't change the requirement that you've got to have more than the majority.

**Phil Bredesen:** I'm obviously not an expert on the subtleties of the filibuster and how it's used, but more kind of an observer at a distance. I'd like to ask you if this is real or not. One of the things that it seems to do to me as a problem is to allow people from both parties to put forth things and argue for things and make an issue out of things without having to actually consider the politics of, because it's not going to happen because of that.

I think you can see it in both parties right now. Republicans are dealing a little bit with some of the fallout from the recent Supreme Court's decision. In my party, I wish some of the people proposing things having to do with climate change would actually have to figure out what that's going to do to the electability of their constituents. To me it just seems to also a way to make a lot of posturing and hide behind it. Is that correct, or am I wrong about how that works?

**Bob Corker:** Well, no question. You have a bill on the Senate floor. Because of the way the filibuster and cloture and everything is today, it's rare to even get a vote on an amendment. But you're right, there's no question that people can talk about things that they know is never going to become law, because that they know it's going to take 60 votes and someone on the other side is going to block it. That's absolutely correct, but there's many other things that, unfortunately, it is done.

Lamar and I used to argue in, Lamar more eloquently I'm sure than me, but we used to argue for people to have restraint. The reason the Senate doesn't function is there's not the self-restraint of allowing people to bring an idea for and debate it. When you've got 100 senators and there's one senator that wants to foul things up on both sides of the aisle, it just takes one, you never end up accomplishing what you intended to accomplish.

I think it's really the restraint piece, which is what we used to argue for, and you argued a lot for it, then now we've said, "Well, it's a way for it to create accommodation to both sides of the aisle." But that's sort of a revisionist thing. In the beginning, what we used to argue for on the Senate floor is for senators, "Please, please don't file. Don't block a cloture vote. Let's go ahead

and have a debate." But over time it just got to where, on every single piece of legislation, someone is going to object, and we're going to have to go through this process that ends the way it does with almost no amendments being voted on because those get blocked, too, in the same manner.

**Lamar Alexander:** Well, I agree with a lot of what Bob said. What Senator Baker and Senator Byrd in the 1980s could persuade senators to work together using the current rules, and they got a lot done. For example, the way they would do it, they would simply say, "I want to bring a bill to the floor", and people would agree. Then they would say, "If you want to have an amendment, you can put it up there. All amendments need to come in by Tuesday at five o'clock, and if they come in, we'll then have a unanimous consent agreement to vote on all of them with 10, 20 minutes of debate. Most of them were by 51 votes, some by 60, and we'll stay here over the weekend until we finish." That's the most powerful tool any majority leader has, to threaten that.

The difference between then and what Bob was describing is, today, they can't get that consent agreement. There are some senators who won't agree to that, and it throws the Senate into a situation where there's no time to bring up the amendments that you would expect. It's kind of like joining the Grand Ole Opry and not being allowed to sing. You join the United States Senate, you expect to be able to offer amendments to the Corker bill, but because somebody objects to amendments and doesn't show restraint, because Bob said the Senate is slowed down in that way.

I've been waiting 20, 25 years for a change in behavior, and I don't think there is going to be one, so I think there's some changes in rules that are necessary, not to eliminate the filibuster, but to reduce the delay.

**Phil Bredesen:** What changes do you want?

**Lamar Alexander:** One would be to have only one 60 vote vote on any bill or any amendment. Now if you want to bring up the Corker bill, the majority says, "I move to proceed to it." And you spend the whole week arguing whether to even bring it up. Eliminate that motion to proceed, which is the way nominations, we want nominate Governor Bredesen to be something. You can bring him right up.

**Bob Corker:** That requires 60 votes.

**Lamar Alexander:** It requires 60 votes, but it would eliminate a week of delay.

**Bill Haslam:** Lamar, let me ask you, one of the questions I have is this. It feels like that the balance of power between the three branches of government has gotten out of whack. Because it's so hard to get anything passed in the Senate, we have the Supreme Court people like, "Well, the court will make that decision about abortion, or President Biden will make that decision

about student debt forgiveness." I feel like because it's gotten so hard, all the decision make like, "Well, we'll just solve it some other way." am I missing something, Lamar?

**Lamar Alexander:** No, no, you're right about that. Take for example the so called Marketplace Fairness Act. We had a big issue with whether to allow states to tax Tennessee, for example, to apply its sales tax to goods sold online in a changing country. I and other senator worked on that for several years, finally passed the Senate. Couldn't get it through the House, actually, but yes, I think that's true. When the Senate doesn't function as well as it should, the Supreme Court steps in, as it did in the case of the taxing internet sales. Supreme Court made the decision instead of the Congress.

**Bob Corker:** But there's no question that our inability to function properly, especially in the Senate, has caused power to devolve especially to the Executive Branch. What you see happening in our country, you have a president who comes in, and they create a bunch of executive orders on many issues that really shouldn't be decided that way, and the country moves over this way.

Then another president comes in and knowing that there's almost no chance of resolving an issue, and it's because of the Senate itself, then the same thing happens going the other way. It's whipsawing our country right now, and I think we've got to figure out a way to overcome it. It's my belief that over time, unfortunately what is going to happen is that, just like in 2013 when over DC circuit judges, which by the way, there was a negotiation underway. There were three openings. The real debate was how many are we really going to appoint? All of a sudden, out of the blue, there was a nuclear option. We blew through the closure.

**Bill Haslam:** Tell us what the nuclear option means.

**Bob Corker:** Okay, the nuclear option is the leader just going down to the floor. Rules in the Senate are to be decided on the first legislative day by a super majority. You're supposed to come to an agreement when you're changing the rules of the Senate, but you can also change it by precedent. What a leader can do, which is very offensive, is to just vote to do away with it. I don't know exactly the terminology there, but it happens just like that on a non debatable motion. And all of a sudden things change.

In 2013, all of a sudden we had circuit court judges, three of them, that were elected, nominated, confirmed, if you will, over 50 votes. Then the Senate, obviously, in 2017, when Republicans had it, we knew that, because of what happened with the former person who had been nominated, that Democrats were not going to approve likely a Republican nominee. Then Republicans blew through it. My guess is, what's going to happen is, over time, the filibuster is just when the circumstances are right. Where you stand typically is where you sit. Over time each party will eventually eliminate most of the elements of the filibuster, and then we will start again.

**Phil Bredeesen:** Bob, are you arguing that the filibuster should simply be eliminated, or are there changes you'd like to see to it?

**Bob Corker:** Well no, because today where I sit, I'm being somewhat facetious, but I would prefer, somehow, that the Senate is going to figure out a way to change the rules. Lamar did a great job in trying to make that happen while he was there. It was ad nauseum discussions that never... It's just not going to happen, in my opinion, so I'm not advocating for that to happen, especially today, because I'm thankful that some of the things that have come to the Senate recently have not become law.

What I'm saying is, as an observation, that it will. When you've got a president today for instance, that is very much a traditionalist of the Senate who's saying just a few months ago that we should do away with a filibuster to pass a certain type of legislation, the Voter Rights Act. What happens is, when there's a proper alignment where you have a president of the same party and the Senate majority and you want to get something done, and for legislation you have to have the house being of the same party, I'm saying that over time I believe the stars will align. I'm observing, not advocating, that we'll just continue. The country will continue to cause the filibuster to be chipped away until eventually it doesn't exist.

What happens, Phil, I'm have a hard time calling you that, what happens is the base of the parties know that. They're pressing senators on each side of the aisle when their side has the ability to do so, to end it. I'm just saying it's likely that's the way it ends up being reformed. I'm not advocating for that. I'd rather see senators have restraint, respect the fact that other people ought to be able to bring up an amendment or an idea, discuss it, and vote on it. I've just not witnessed that behavior while I've been there, and I don't think we're going to witness it anytime soon.

**Lamar Alexander:** Well, I hope Bob's wrong, because presidents want rid of the filibuster because they want to run over the Senate. They don't want any opposition. The base of both parties, the extreme left extreme right, they don't like the filibuster because they'd like to brow beat people in primaries to go take an extreme view on abortion, on guns, on taxes, on climate, you name it, that's what they're for.

You'll put out a business, senators who want to work across the aisle as Senator Baker did, and get a result. There'll be no need to. All you have to do is get everybody in your own party to vote with you, which happens all the time. Now the Democrats and Republicans do it differently. The Democrats, well, they're going to jump off the cliff. They'll just all hold their nose and jump off the cliff together. The Republicans will all jump off the cliff, too, but they'll, Rand Paul would do a flip and Ted Cruz will do a belly flop, and somebody else will do a different one, but we'll all do the same thing.

If you want to see a Democratic Congress and president, eliminate all the right to work laws, establish the abortion rule for the country, import California's energy legislation to Tennessee

and double our electric rates. If you want to see that, that's what you'll get. Or if the Republicans were to get on the other side, you'll see the reverse. So I don't think that's necessary. I think people throw the word filibuster around.

It's not the filibuster, it's not the 60 vote requirement that's the problem. It's the delay, and the delay is unnecessary. You could change it by one, eliminating the motion to proceed to a legislation. That would remove a week from things. You could shorten. You could get rid of what's called the intervening day. Once you make a motion, you've got to wait a day to vote on it. There's no need to do that. And three, you could shorten the period of time after you decide to cut off debate to debate the bill.

Those three things would mean you could take legislation up much more rapidly, but in the end you'd still have to get 60 votes to cut off debate before you could vote on the bill.

**Bob Corker:** I agree with all of that. And again, I know you're hoping, I'm just observing what I think is the likely outcome. I'm not hoping for that either. This proposal that Lamar is bringing up has been proposed almost every Congress, and typically, it's proposed at a time when we don't know who's going to control the Senate. The best time to bring up something like this is when people don't really know who's going to... Matter of fact, right now would be a great time to bring it up. Who's going to control the Senate? That was when these types of proposals were discussed. But Lamar, as good as you were and are-

**Bill Haslam:** Nice catch, Bob.

**Bob Corker:** No, it wasn't a catch. He was in the Senate, he is now here. But the fact is, you were really good, and you advocated for these things. Every single Congress that I was there. Again, that was at a time when we actually had a broader group of people who were in the middle.

By the way, I thought I had more influence in the beginning. Being in the minority and being willing to reach across the aisle, knowing the other side needs 60 votes, you can have tremendous impact on legislation. Now unfortunately, that number has diminished and therefore the influence of somebody who's willing to reach across has lessened to a degree, but we've seen some things happen this year.

**Bill Haslam:** One of the reasons that Phil and I decided to do this is like I said, we've both been mayors, we've both been governors. We realize that solving problems is hard. You take the difficult issues of the country, immigration. That's a complex discussion that's going to involve compromise, and I tell people we don't have a national policy on immigration. One, because it's complex, and two, because both sides make money off of it now, raise money off of branding the other side.

You all have both, like I said, served in mayor, governor, senators, et cetera. What ideas do you

have for... We talked a little bit about the filibuster, but how can we get to where there's more incentive to solve the hard problems?

**Bob Corker:** An unfortunate way of getting there, and we've seen it happen time and again, is when there's a crisis. We saw it happen in '08 when 72 senators on the Senate floor, none of whom wanted to vote for TARP, no Democrat wanted to bail out a bank and no Republican wanted to engage in interfering in the free enterprise system, and yet we did it. So it does happen in times of crisis.

Unfortunately, crisis is creating harm to the people that we represent across the country. Phil Bredeesen may have a response. Obviously, it takes, in my opinion, the ultimate, while Howard Baker was the great senator that he was, the person who really can affect that kind of thing, is obviously a president who wants to solve problems and wants to reach across the aisle and has the ability to bring people to them like Howard Baker was able to do.

I know that's a trite answer, because everybody would respond in that way, but we do come together. We do come together in times of crisis. People get serious. They realize a lot is at stake, and people all across the country will be harmed if something isn't dealt with.

**Phil Bredeesen:** Lamar, I want to just follow up a second on what you said a moment ago where you were positing the specter of we were going to pass all this terrible legislation that fringe groups and both of our parties wanted. You mentioned California's climate action becoming national law. I've actually always thought, not being the expert, that something different would happen on that, and that what you would do would be, if progressives out of California brought that forth, you'd force a lot of Democrats who lived in places other than California to say, "Okay, am I really ready to vote on something that's going to raise the gas prices by 50 cents?" I suspect on both parties you'd find an awful lot of people, when faced with the realities of those extreme things, who couldn't bring themselves to do it.

**Lamar Alexander:** Phil, I think you're right. There would be some of that, but there might not be much of it. In the current situation, you had Joe Manchin and Kyrsten Sinema, who didn't want to go along with a Democratic bill that raised taxes and did other things they thought would increase inflation. But there were only two of them. If the Democrats had a majority of one or two or three, that earlier bill would be law. But Manchin and Sinema forced to compromise that they could live with and that I think, personally, that the country can live with more easily. So I think you're right. I think that if Republicans or Democrats come up with an extreme proposal, there'll be some members of their own party who won't go along with it, but I do believe that if you get big majorities in the Senate, you'll have a drive to impose radical legislation on the country one way or the other, and as soon as the next crowd gets in, they'll go the other direction.

The thing we're missing here, too, is that it's always been hard to pass legislation in the Senate for a good reason. It's there to be dealing with only the biggest issues, in my view, and to keep

talking until you found something we could live with, and over the last several years, a lot of important legislation has passed. Bob's worked on some of it. I have, and at the end of the last session there was the Great American Outdoors Act. That's the most important piece of environmental legislation in 50 years. There was 21st Century cures, which had a big role in making us ready for the COVID response in terms of vaccines. There was fixing no child left behind, very difficult legislation, to change all the elementary and secondary education law from transgender to school choice. And that most people voted for in the end.

The result is that you don't hear anybody talking about changing those laws, because we had a consensus, and it'll be the law for the next 10 or 15 years. We won't go swinging back and forth. Even today, infrastructure, chips bill, gun bill doesn't seem like much, but all those pieces of legislation has had the support of the Republican leader, and they passed even in the environment we have today.

**Bill Haslam:** The series is called, "You Might Be Right," after Senator Baker's famous statement. Can each of you think of a time when you thought, hopefully on a filibuster related issue, but just in general where, after the discussion, you thought, "You might be right. I've ended up in a different place than I started on this?"

**Bob Corker:** I would have difficulty recalling a specific case right now, but I can assure you in a committee hearing where you're debating, that that's where more real work takes place. The Senate floor, I used to kind of kid about this, but kind of believe it. Nothing important ever happened on the Senate floor. It all happened in the committees where these things were being developed, and it was there that you could hear people who were serious about a piece of legislation, say things and you'd go, "That makes a lot of sense."

Then when the hearing's over, you go over and say something to that person, you set up a meeting, and the next thing you know, you're on the way to passing a bill. It happened all the time, and I think that your willingness to actually sit through a complete hearing, hear what somebody says about a topic, realize that with that person you can probably get 80% of what you want done. They're getting 80% too, by the way, because there's always some overlap. But I'll try to think of a specific incidence before...

**Lamar Alexander:** I can give you one. When I was chairman of the Education Committee, it was time to fix no child left behind, so I thought I would do the way it's usually done. I drafted a bill and said to Patty Murray, the Democratic senator from Washington, who is the senior Democrat on the committee, I introduced the bill, "And we'll start having hearings, and we'll have a bipartisan process, and we'll amend the bill, we'll take it to the floor." She said, "No you won't." And I said, "Why is that?" She said, "We'll either write the bill together or we won't have one."

Now because she had the power of the filibuster, I had to listen to her. We had the majority, but what she was saying was, "You'll never get 60 votes if you don't do it the way I want to do it." So I thought about it and said, "Okay, we'll do it your way." We wrote the bill together. This is a

committee of 23 senators from Rand Paul to Elizabeth Warren. We came up with a bill that every single one of those senators voted for in committee, and this is a bill that, as I mentioned earlier, takes everything from school choice to transgender to common core, all the difficult issues you can imagine.

It's like going to a UT football game. There are 100,000 people in the stands. They've all played a little football. They know exactly which play to call next. Same thing with education. Everybody knew what to do about the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, but every single senator voted for it. It went to the floor. We had a number of amendments on the floor, and then the bill passed with 85 votes. It was a very hard bill to pass, very contentious, but I think because I listened to Patty and did it her way instead of my way, we got the result, and if I hadn't, we wouldn't.

**Bill Haslam:** Let me ask a final question. You've both had multiple years of public service and multiple roles. What do you know now... One of the things I say about politics is being an elected office, I think it's like when people drink too much alcohol. You think it makes you smarter, but it doesn't, because when you're in the middle of it, people are coming, "What do you think about this? What do you think about that?" You're trying to solve the problems you're in the middle of.

Well, what do you know now that you have some perspective that you maybe didn't know when you were in the heat of the battle, whether you were being a mayor or a governor, a senator, a cabinet secretary?

**Bob Corker:** Look, I've learned about myself that... Well, I'm not going to say that. Look, I've been around a lot of wonderful public servants, and I honor public service. I know there's some people here serve at the local level, state level and elsewhere, and I truly honor it. I'm thankful for people who want to serve in that way.

What I learned in the Senate, especially being chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, is that there are no wise men or wise women. There are none. That we all wake up each day, we do the best we can. Some people are more prepared for certain types of things because they've done things in the past that really prepare them for certain types of service. But at the end of the day, and in particular I'm talking about the Senate here, there are no wise men, no wise women. We make mistakes. People do the best that they can, and even the people that you've seen heralded and Lamar and I have been able to work up closely and very personally with these people. They still make mistakes.

We're all just trying to do the best we can, and that to me is an important thing for all of us who serve to realize, but also the people who elect us. We're fallible. We try hard, and it's something to know, especially when you're dealing with the issues of war and peace, declarations of war, sending young men and women into harm's way, thinking the answer. Those are cases, many cases, where I've listened to people and they were right, and it affected me in a big way.

**Phil Bredeesen:** Both of you have spoken in some ways about changes in the way things have happened in Washington, and Bob, I think you in particular about that spirit of being willing to move things forward and so on was not as present in today's Congress. I'm kind of curious that really from both of you of setting aside ideology and party affiliation, what are the kinds of things that a citizen really ought to be looking for when they make a decision about who to vote for, setting aside party and ideology, but the character traits, the life history of people who are running for these offices? Do you have any thoughts on that?

**Bob Corker:** I think people in public office, this sounds corny I know to people, but I'm sorry, I think they have to truly have a servant's heart. I think they truly are running or serving to serve people and to have a compassion for people. I think it takes also a tremendous amount of character to withstand some of the pressures that come with that.

Obviously, integrity. In public office, if you ever conduct yourself lacking integrity, it's damaging. You're not able to have the effect that someone serving an office should be, so certainly character, integrity. But I want to say it truly begins with knowing and feeling that desire to serve people. I'm thankful to be on stage with three people who I know have those traits.

**Lamar Alexander:** I would answer, Phil, someone like Howard Baker. If you're in your twenties and your thirties and you're ambitious and smart and hardworking, you could do a lot of different things. You can go into business, you can go into education, you can go into politics. As a lot of us were coming along, Howard Baker inspired us to get involved in politics, to build a two party system in Tennessee. He attracted a lot of really talented people to do that, and they in turn attracted a lot of other very talented people, people who served in the cabinets of these governors here.

For about 50 years, Tennessee has had a very interesting situation where we've had intense competition between the Republican and Democratic parties for about a 60 year period. That attracted talented people, and that got really good results for our state, so I think you look for people like Howard Baker, who good character, inspiring, intelligent. That's somebody you'd want to introduce your family to, your children to, somebody you'd like your son or daughter to grow up to be like.

To the question Bill asked a little earlier, what did I learn? One thing I learned was what a privilege it is to be in a public office, because of the things that you're able to do that you really don't realize until you're there. Bill Haslam said something to me like that one time, but I saw Bill Fris this morning.

When he came to see me about running for the Senate in 1994 or three, I said, "Why would you do that? You're already one of the top heart lung transplant surgeons in the world." He said, "Well, I could keep doing that. Fly down to Chattanooga, cut a heart out, put it in a garbage bag, come back to Vanderbilt, have a nine hour operation, save a life, and I see people every day,

almost every day, whose life I've saved. But maybe if I'm in public life, I might help save millions of lives." Of course, he did that in the United States Senate with his work on hiv aids, just as one example.

I see that in the positions I've been privileged to hold, and I think each one of us on this stage feel that way. I think people would be surprised to realize how much good you can do if you have the privilege of having elected office.

**Bob Corker:** I would add one thing to the qualifications. I think you want someone who has demonstrated success in whatever field they've been in, the ability to accomplish, to create a vision and begin with the end in mind and to make it happen, whether it's an education... No matter what field it's in, but I think you want demonstrated success. You don't want to elect someone who hasn't shown, in some field, that that's the case. I agree with Lamar, what a great, great privilege it is.

I'll say one other thing that I don't think I realized until after I left, about being in the public arena. I'm a doer, a producer like all of y'all. I had no idea the impact of one's voice. Matter of fact, people used to say, "Corker, gosh. You're leaving? We're going to miss your voice." It was almost offensive to me like, "My voice? What about what I'm doing?" And then I realized when I left that people across our country need a voice too, and it has an effect on them. Anyway, what a privilege that is, and what a privilege to have spent time in the public arena working with each of you.

**Bill Haslam:** That feels like a great place to wrap up. Personally, you talked about Howard Baker, inspiring a lot of people. I was one of those Lamar, but you were the second person who inspired me. Bob literally talked me into running for mayor, or I would've never been up here, and Phil ran the state in such a way that when I was handed the baton from him, it was a much easier race to run. So thank you, all of you, for being a part of this discussion. It's been great to be with you tonight.

**Phil Bredesen:** Let me add my own thanks as well. It's been a privilege being with both of you here tonight.

**Marianne Wanamaker:** Thanks for listening to "You Might Be Right." Be sure to follow on Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or wherever you listen to your favorite shows and please help spread the word by sharing, rating, and reviewing the show.

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