



ROY BLUNT *of* MISSOURI, CHAIRMAN

Chairman Blunt's Opening Statement

Markup of Improving Procedures for the Consideration of Nominations in the Senate

I would like to welcome my colleagues to today's meeting of the Rules Committee. I am pleased to return to the Chairmanship of this Committee and I look forward to working with my fellow members on both legislation and oversight.

I am particularly fortunate to have Senator Klobuchar as my Ranking Member. The Senator and I have worked together on many issues during our time in the Senate and I look forward to continuing our working relationship in the years to come.

I welcome Senator Hyde-Smith to the Committee. Senator, you follow in the footsteps of Senators Stennis, Lott, Cochran, and, of course, join our colleague Senator Wicker, in a long history of service on the Rules Committee by Mississippi Senators. We look forward to your contribution.

This afternoon we meet to markup S. Res. 355, a resolution for "improving procedures for the consideration of nominations in the Senate." Senator Lankford introduced S. Res. 355 on December 7, 2017. The Committee subsequently held a hearing on the resolution on December 19, 2017.

The text of S. Res. 355 was taken from a resolution (S. Res. 15) that passed 78-16 in the 113th Congress. Senator Lankford has proposed a simple resolution that, if adopted, would allow the Senate to vote on nominees in a streamlined manner, once a majority of the Senate decided to end debate. Senators would still be allowed to speak about all but the most senior executive and judicial nominees for eight hours after cloture has been invoked. Additionally, Senators would be given two hours to discuss the merits of individual District Court judges. This resolution would not change the 30 hours of post cloture debate available to Senators to discuss the nominations of Cabinet Secretaries, Supreme Court justices, or Circuit Court judges. The process I described worked well when Senator Reid was the Majority Leader and President Obama was in the White House. President Trump, and every President who follows, should be afforded the same opportunity.

I support the Lankford Resolution and look forward to today's discussion and vote to send it to the floor for the Senate's consideration. Senator Lankford's resolution addresses two main issues all Senators, regardless of party, should care about. First, we all should agree that Presidents should be able to appoint officials to carry out their agenda. Excessive and unproductive delays of nominees thwart the will of the voters, frustrate the American people, and deter qualified individuals from public service. Our citizens are not well served when their agencies are without leaders. Second, the floor of the Senate should be used for more than nominations. In the current Congress, 20% of nominations where cloture was filed, eventually passed with votes of 90 or more "ayes" or by voice vote. A tremendous amount of time was wasted on noncontroversial nominees. Clearly, this is time the Senate could have better utilized.

Today's discussion and debate is important for the future of the Senate. I look forward to hearing from my colleagues.

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