

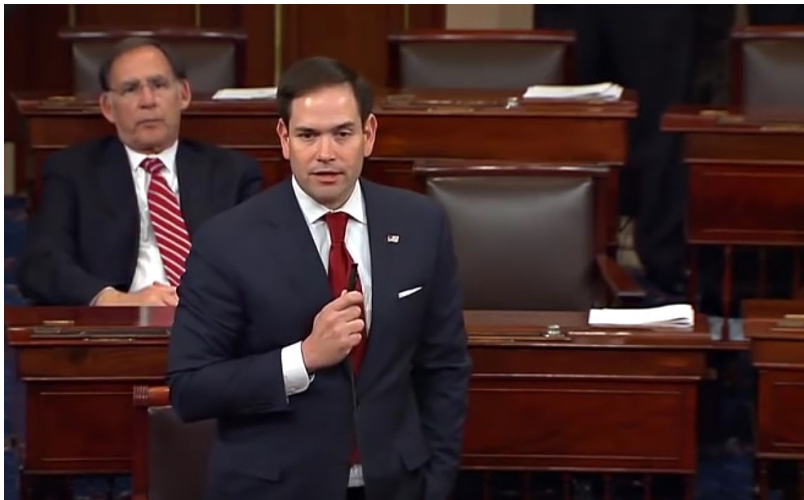


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Marco Rubio

Senate Floor Speech on Civility in the Senate

delivered 7 February 2017, Washington, D.C.



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Senator Rubio: First a parliamentary inquiry about -- these are the continuing rules of the Senate that have been in existence previous to this time and have carried over into this session, is that correct?

Presiding Officer: The senator is correct.

Senator Rubio: And the reason I ask that, Mr. President, is the following: Look, I think we all feel very passionate about the issues before us. I have not been here as long as Senator Leahy, whose service here is quite distinguished and a long period of time, and I truly do understand the passions people bring to this body. I'd feel to think -- I'd like to think that I too am passionate about the issues before us and I think this is an important moment.



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It's late. I doubt very many people are paying attention. I wish they would though because I think what's a question here is perhaps one of the very reasons why I ran for this body to begin with. And maybe it's because of my background and where I'm surrounded by people that have lost freedoms in places where they're not allowed to speak. One of the great traditions of our nation is the ability to come forward and have debates. But the founders and the framers and those who established this institution and guided it for over two centuries understood that that debate was impossible if in fact matters became of a personal nature.

And let me begin by saying that I don't believe that that was necessarily the intention here, although that was perhaps the way it turned out. But I think it's important for us to understand why that matters so much.

I want people to think about our politics here today in America because I'm telling you guys I don't know of a single nation in the history of the world that's been able to solve its problems when half the people in a country absolutely hate the other half of people in that country. This is the most important country in the world. And this body cannot function if people are offending one another, and that's why those rules are in place.

I was not here when Secretary Clinton was nominated as a member of this body at the time. But I can tell you that I am just barely old enough to know that some very nasty things have been written and said about Secretary Clinton. And I think the Senate should be very proud that during her nomination to be Secretary of State, despite the fact that I imagine many people were not excited about the fact that she would be Secretary of State, to my recollection, and perhaps I'm incorrect, not a single one of those horrible things that have been written or said about her, some of which actually did accuse her of wrongdoing, were ever uttered on the floor of the Senate.

I happen to remember in 2004 when -- when then-Senator Kerry ran for President. Some pretty strong things were written and said about him. I was here for that vote when he was nominated and confirmed to be Secretary of State. And I don't recall a single statement being written into the record about the things that had been said about him.



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And I want everybody to understand at the end of the night, this is not a partisan issue. It really is not. I can tell you this with full confidence: If one of my colleagues on this side of the aisle had done that, I would -- I would like to think that I would have been one of the people objecting -- and here's why.

Turn on the news and watch these parliaments around the world where people throw chairs at each other, and punches, and ask yourself how does that make you feel about those countries? Doesn't give you a lot of confidence about those countries. Now I'm not arguing that we're anywhere near that here tonight, but we're flirting with it. We're flirting with it in this body and we are flirting with it in this country. We have become a society incapable of having debates anymore.

In this country, if you watch the big policy debates that are going on in America, no one ever stops to say, "I think you're wrong, I understand your point of view -- I get it. You have some valid points, but let me tell you why I think my view is better." I don't hear that anymore. Here's what I hear, almost automatically -- and let me be fair, from both sides of these debates. Immediately, immediately, as soon as you offer an idea, the other side jumps and says, "The reason why you say that is because you don't care about poor people." "Because you only care about rich people." Because you're this, or you're that or you're the other. And I'm just telling you guys, we have -- we are reaching a point in this Republic where we're not going to be able to solve the simplest of issues because everyone is putting themselves in a corner where everyone hates everybody.

Now I don't pretend to say that I have -- am not myself from time to time in heated debates outside of this forum; been guilty of perhaps of hyperbole, and for those -- I'm not proud of. But I gotta tell you I think what's at stake here tonight, and as we debate moving forward, is not simply some rule but the ability of the most important nation on earth to debate in a productive and respectful way the pressing issues before us. And I just hope we understand that because I have tremendous respect for the other chamber and I understand that it was designed to be different.

But one of the reasons why I chose to run for the Senate, and quite frankly to run for reelection, is because I believe that I serve with 99 other men and women who deeply love their country, who have different points of view, who represent men and women who have



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different views from the men and women that I may represent on a given issue, and who are here to advocate for their points of view -- and never impugning their motives.

One of the things I take great pride in -- and I tell this to people all the time -- is the one thing you learn about the Senate is whether you agree with them or not, you understand why every single one of those other 99 people are here -- because they're intelligent people; they're smart people; they're hardworking people; they believe in what they're saying, and they...articulate it in a very passionate and effective way. And I understand when I see my colleagues stand up and say something I don't agree with, I try to tell myself, "Look I don't understand why they stand for that but I know why they are doing it; because they represent people who believe that."

And I am so grateful that God has allowed me to be born and to live and to raise my family in a -- in a nation where people with such different points of view are able to debate those things in a way that doesn't lead to war, that doesn't lead to overthrows, that doesn't lead to violence.

And you may take that for granted. I'm telling you that right now, all around the world tonight, there are people that if they stood up here and said the things that we say about the -- the President or others in authority, you go to jail. And I'm not saying that's where we are headed as a nation. I'm just saying don't ever take that for granted.

And the lynchpin of that is this institution. The lynchpin of that debate is the ability of this institution, through unlimited debate and the decorum necessary for that debate, to be able to conduct itself in that manner.

And so, I know that tonight is probably a made-for-TV moment for some people. This has nothing to do with censoring the words of some of the great heroes. I have extraordinary admiration for the men and women who led the civil rights effort in this country. And I am self-conscious enough...or understanding to know that many of the things that have been possible for so many people in this country in the 21st century were made possible by the sacrifices and the work of those in that movement that came before us.



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This has to do with the fundamental reality -- and that is that this body cannot carry out its work if it is not able to conduct debates in a way that is respectful of one another, especially those of us who are in this chamber together. And I also understand this: that if the Senate ceases to work, if we reach a point where this institution, given everything else that's going on in politics today, where you are basically allowed to say just about anything. For I have seen over the last year and half things said about people, about issues, about institutions in our republic, that I never thought I would see -- ever.

Ever.

If we lose this body's ability to conduct debate in a dignified manner, and I mean this with no disrespect towards anyone else -- I don't believe anyone else came on this floor here tonight saying, "I'm going to be disrespectful on purpose and...turn this into a circus." But I'm just telling you that if this body loses the ability to have those sorts of debate, then where in this country is that going to happen? What other forum in this nation is that going to be possible?

And so, I would just hope everybody would stop and think about that. I know I've only been here six years so I don't have a deep reservoir of Senate history to rely on. But I know this: If this body is incapable of having those debates, there will be no place in this country where those debates can occur. And I -- I think every single one of us, to our great shame, will live to regret it.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.