

## Rights of Minority Voices in the Senate - 2005

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Moses' father-in-law, (Jethro) said to him. . . . chose capable. . . , trustworthy men. . .  
let them judge the people  
Exodus 18:21

Women of Reform Judaism has a long-standing history of supporting minority rights, equal justice for all under the law, and freedom of speech. At this time we are concerned that the United States constitutional system of checks and balances that protects our rights is endangered by efforts in the Senate to trigger the so-called "nuclear option" to eliminate the right to use the filibuster on judicial nominations. The Constitution mandates that the judicial appointments of the president be made with the advice and consent of the Senate. Elimination of the filibuster would prevent those in the Senate minority from having the meaningful opportunity to express opposition to a presidential nominee supported by a narrow majority, placing enormous power in the hands of the majority.

The federal courts have played an important part in our nation's history of social justice, including civil rights, reproductive rights, separation of religion and state, and environmental protections. Although the filibuster has been used infrequently regarding nominations to the federal bench, its availability provides protection from abuse of power and forces bipartisan discussion, cooperation and consensus.

As stated in a recent letter from religious leaders\* to Senator Bill Frist and Senator Harry Reid, "It would be dangerous to eliminate a safeguard that now helps prevent politicians from filling the courts with judges who would turn the courts into extensions of their political power. Although the filibuster has previously been used in our nation's history to work against social justice progress, it is now a crucial tool to help prevent efforts to undermine that progress. Senators of both parties should reject the destructive 'nuclear option.'"

The Women of Reform Judaism Board of Directors opposes the "nuclear option" because the role of the Senate to advise and consent is fundamental to the future of rights and liberties in our nation, requiring that the voices of the minority be heard for consensual deliberation. Therefore the Women of Reform Judaism Board of Directors:

1. Calls on Senate leadership and their colleagues to reject the "nuclear option" to eliminate the filibuster and
2. Urges U.S. sisterhoods and members to respond to WRJ and RAC alerts to take action to protect the rights of minority voices in the Senate.

\* This letter, sent on May 5, 2005, was signed by Jewish and Christian clergy from throughout the United States, including Rabbi David Saperstein, under the letterhead of African American Ministers in Action, a project of People for the American Way.

*For more information on WRJ and Social Justice, visit [www.wrj.org/social-justice-home](http://www.wrj.org/social-justice-home)*