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Senate Democrats Block 3 More Bush Judicial Nominees

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Senate Democrats blocked three more Bush nominees for federal appeals courts yesterday as Republicans and Democrats accused each other of trampling Senate rules, tradition and comity to advance their political agendas.

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Friday's Question:

It was not until the early 20th century that the Senate enacted rules allowing members to end filibusters and unlimited debate. How many votes were required to invoke cloture when the Senate first adopted the rule in 1917?

- 51
- 60
- 64
- 67

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The votes against Michigan jurists Henry W. Saad, Richard A. Griffin and David W. McKeague for the Cincinnati-based U.S. Court of Appeals for the 6th Circuit brought to 10 the total of Bush appellate court nominees whom Democrats have filibustered. Nearly 200 of President Bush's nominees for district and circuit courts have been approved without filibusters.

In largely party-line votes, all three fell at least six votes short of the 60 needed to end the Democrats' stalling tactics and force an up-or-down vote on the nominations.

The votes came just as Congress prepared to recess for the Democratic and Republican

conventions. Republicans made it clear they intend to use the filibusters as an issue in the November presidential and congressional elections.

"It is the American people, I believe, who in a little more than 100 days, will next vote on this issue," Sen. John Cornyn (R-Tex.) said in a statement after the votes.

For months, Republicans have accused Democrats of breaking with Senate tradition in pursuing a filibuster strategy to kill judicial nominations that have the support of a majority of senators but lack the 60 votes needed to break filibusters.

Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Orrin G. Hatch (R-Utah) renewed the charge Wednesday, saying, "It is a sad commentary on the deterioration of the judicial confirmation process that we are now approaching double-digit filibusters."

Democrats returned fire by charging that Republicans broke with tradition in brushing aside the objections of the nominees' home-state senators, Democrats Carl M. Levin and Debbie Stabenow.

In what amounts to a "double standard," Republicans heeded such home-state objections from Republicans during the Clinton administration but now pay no attention when Democrats object to Bush nominees from their states, said Sen. Patrick J. Leahy (Vt.), the ranking Democrat on the judiciary panel. "Rule after rule has been broken or twisted until the process so long agreed upon is hardly recognizable anymore," he said.

Levin and Stabenow complained that Republicans refused to act on President Bill Clinton's nominees for

the same court and that Bush rejected suggestions for a bipartisan commission to make recommendation on Michigan nominees -- a practice used by several other large states.

Majority Whip Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.) accused Levin and Stabenow of trying to usurp the president's power to nominate judges. "What we're talking about, then, is senators wanting to adorn themselves with the power of co-nomination," he said.

Democrats questioned Saad's fairness, said Griffin injected his own conservative views into opinions and criticized McKeague's decisions in environmental cases.

Saad and Griffin sit on the Michigan Court of Appeals. McKeague is a federal district judge. If confirmed, Saad would be the first Arab American to sit on the 6th Circuit bench.

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