

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 30, 2013

The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable John Boehner
Speaker of the House
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Minority Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Majority Leader Reid, Speaker Boehner, and Minority Leaders McConnell and Pelosi:

For the past two years, we have called on our colleagues in the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives to sit interspersed - across party lines - at President Obama's State of the Union address. And for two years running, members have joined us. Although this gesture did not end Washington gridlock, we feel it has been a very important step in the right direction, symbolizing the importance of working together to solve the common challenges we face in securing a strong future for the United States.

This year, as we begin a new Congress, we are again asking our colleagues to sit together as representatives of the American people and not just representatives of political parties. We believe that with your help, we can make this a permanent tradition.

Although our political discourse often falls short of what the country expects, we are all United States senators and congressmen. In these historically challenging times for our nation, we all share the goal of putting the United States back on the right track and getting Americans back to work. Political differences will always generate a healthy debate, but too often these differences prevent each side from even coming to the table to work toward the compromises and common-sense solutions our constituents want. It's little wonder that the American people have such a low regard for Congress and a lack of confidence in their governmental institutions.

So, now more than ever, we have the obligation to show that there is a place for civility and comity on Capitol Hill. As we have seen over the past two years, bipartisan seating at the State of the Union Address has started to chip away at the decades-old tradition where Members traditionally took part in choreographed standing and clapping on one side of the Chamber while the other side sat in silent protest. This entrenched tradition was unbecoming of our institution, especially when we should be striving for ways to put aside our differences and stand united.

We therefore continue to believe that permanent bipartisan seating at the State of the Union address would be one small way to bridge our partisan divide and to encourage Members to find solutions to our nation's problems. Let us encourage members of this 113th Congress – particularly those members who are new to Capitol Hill – to move this tradition forward.

With respect,



Mark Udall
United States Senator



Lisa Murkowski
United States Senator