

Lott: Bipartisanship is key to ending shutdown

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Congress, citing a turnover of nearly 50 percent in the

BILOXI — It's been nearly six years since Trent Lott held a seat in the U.S. Congress. But the former Senate majority leader still had plenty to say about the nation's leadership on day 15 of the federal government shutdown.

"I'm disappointed, like everybody else," he said Tuesday morning before delivering the closing address at the 53rd annual meeting of the Southern States Energy Board at the Beau

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 Senate in the last six years, and a 50 percent turnover in the House of Representatives.

"You've got a lot of new members who haven't been through it before, and they think they can get stuff done. Sometimes they just can't," he said.

Before his speech, Lott recalled his time as a young senator.

"When I went into the Senate I was a young, warrior-type guy, I raised a lot of Cain and got nothing done." He said after about six months he realized it was time to change his style.

"I spent six months keeping my mouth shut and learning the institution," he said. "Six-and-a-half years later, I was the majority leader."

Shutdown in 1995

In 1995, during Lott's time as Senate majority whip, there was a 21-day government shutdown Lott said he opposed from the beginning.

"I remember distinctly we had a meeting in (then-Sen.) Bob Dole's office with (then-U.S. Rep.) Newt Gingrich, who was the speaker at the time," he said. "I pulled Newt aside and said 'I don't think this is a good idea. I don't think we should do it.'"

But Lott said the government shut down despite his opposition, and some good did come from it.

"A lot of people say it was

worse than it really was. In fact, it led to a lot of negotiations that were really good for the country," he said. "So always look for the kernel of positive aspects or hope."

"But this situation ... the economy isn't really being hurt yet, but it's not helping it."

Communication is key

Lott said during his time as Senate majority leader, communication played a major role.

"When I was majority leader and Bill Clinton was president, we talked and we met all the time," he said. "Did we have an easy time? No. We had a lot of disagreements, but we would find a way to reach an agreement that we thought was good for the country."

Lott said the Senate's most favorable rating, 82 percent, came at a time when bipartisanship was high and everyone in Congress was willing to work together — right after 9/11.

"People saw us working together in the aftermath of a disaster to get things done for our country," he said. "I'm glad it looks like the senators are working together to try to come up with something. Hopefully, that'll pass the House."

Since stepping down from his Senate seat in 2007, Lott has been affiliated with the Butler Snow law firm and Patton Boggs lobbying firm.

"I stay very busy, but I miss it sometimes," he said. "Then on other occasions, like today, I see why I left."



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Rivage Resort & Casino. "I had hoped they could find a way to come together."

Though Lott came to Biloxi to speak about energy in the South, he told attendees he first wanted to address the "elephant in the room."

"You know this is not good," he told the audience of legislators, government officials and staff members, environmental representatives and industry officials. "One of the problems in Washington now isn't just that our leaders can't find a way to lead. We also need some followers. You've got to have followers or you're useless as a leader."

Lott noted the high volume of new lawmakers in





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Former Sen. Trent Lott talks to attendees at the Southern States Energy Board meeting at Beau Rivage Resort & Casino in Biloxi on Tuesday.