

was the bill to rewrite ‘No Child Left Behind.’ The law had proved to be unworkable and unpopular. And by the time it came out of committee, you had the Democrats and the Republicans lined up, it went to the floor, it was relatively open for amendments, not that absolutely everybody got everything they wanted, and in the end, it passed with a very large majority. President Obama called it a ‘Christmas Miracle’ and the Wall Street Journal said it was ‘the largest devolution of federal control to the states in a quarter-century.’”

MCCONNELL is quick to list a series of bipartisan accomplishments during his time as majority leader which he regards as “concrete legislative results for the American people.” In addition to the first significant education reform since 2002, these accomplishments include the first significant reforms to Social Security since 1983, the first trade promotion authority bill since 2002, the first long-term highway bill since 2005, and the first major legislation to confront the Nation’s opioid crisis. And don’t forget, he says, measures to protect victims of human trafficking, to address Puerto Rico’s fiscal crisis, to sanction North Korea, to strengthen the Nation’s cybersecurity defenses, to reform Medicaid and to provide permanent tax relief for families and small businesses. These are serious accomplishments for a legislative body many had written off as irredeemably broken.

“Now, what do all these things that we have done time after time under our majority have in common?” he asks. “In a time of divided government, we’re focusing on the things that we can agree on, and do those. Because when people elect divided government, I think what they’re saying is, I know you have big differences, but why don’t you look for the things you agree on and do those. And that’s how this majority is totally different from the previous one.”

To gather other clues for what kind of majority leader MCCONNELL would be, one only had to look to previous Congresses when he was minority leader and was at the center of four major, bipartisan legislative efforts that helped to keep the American economy from being seriously damaged. At the end of 2010, the country was facing a tax “cliff.” Republicans controlled neither the White House nor Congress. With an economy still reeling from the Great Recession, the expiration of tax relief threatened to further imperil the economy; yet Senator MCCONNELL led a bipartisan effort to ensure that taxes were not raised on any Americans.

The next year, the United States was on the verge of defaulting on its debt payments for the first time in history. With the clock ticking on the full faith and credit of the United States and calamitous economic consequences staring policymakers in the face, Senator MCCONNELL negotiated an eleventh hour deal with Vice President Joe

Biden. This measure avoided the devastating economic consequences of default and resulted in the most significant spending reductions in recent memory.

In late 2012, the United States risked prolonging the Great Recession and increasing unemployment due to a series of expiring tax policies and indiscriminate spending cuts scheduled to take effect on January 1, 2013. Once again, Senator MCCONNELL crafted a bipartisan compromise with Vice President Biden to avert this fiscal crisis by preventing a tax increase on a majority of Americans and making the spending cuts in a more prudent manner.

Finally, in 2013, a standoff involving Federal spending and the debt limit led to the second longest Federal shutdown since 1980, threatening thousands of public and private sector jobs, and putting the economic health of the country in jeopardy. Despite these challenges, Senator MCCONNELL orchestrated an agreement with then-Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid that reopened the government and raised the debt ceiling, allowing the United States to continue making payments on its debt.

The humorist Roy Blount, Jr., who grew up in Georgia has written, “You start getting in trouble when you stop sounding like where you grew up.” The political corollary is you start getting in trouble when you stop coming home. This is advice MCCONNELL has not forgotten. He and his wife, Elaine, go home to Kentucky almost every weekend. He has kept his eye on Kentucky matters, both large and small, including disposal of chemical weapons that have long been stored in the middle of Kentucky, enacting a tobacco buyout to help local farmers, support for the State’s public universities, and his advocacy for workers at the Paducah Gaseous Diffusion Plant. Kentucky anglers and tourists appreciate his helping to enact a law to require the Army Corps of Engineers to allow fishing below the dams on the Cumberland River. Twenty years ago, he created the McConnell Center at the University of Louisville, attracting a bipartisan parade of national leaders to visit with 10 scholars chosen each year from each undergraduate class.

Each year, MITCH MCCONNELL buys 12 season tickets to the University of Louisville football games. He said:

I have some regulars. We go to every home game and occasionally an away game. We make a day of it. We go out early. One of my friends has an RV in the parking lot and we will talk about what will happen in the game and then go to the game and then we talk about what did happen after the game and it’s a complete, lengthy exercise. And one of the great joys of life.

MITCH MCCONNELL’s University of Louisville honors thesis on Henry Clay tempted him to pursue a Ph.D. in American history and a career as a professor, but those of us who know him doubt that he would have been satisfied interpreting the action rather than being in the middle of the action, but

his devotion to American history and his understanding of the importance of the U.S. Senate as a unique institution in American life have contributed a valuable extra dimension to his Senate leadership.

In a 2016 C-SPAN interview, he was asked: “What would you like for high school American history teachers to tell their students about the United States Senate?”

He replied:

That the Senate has been the indispensable legislative body. Because that’s the place where things are sorted out, the place where only rarely does the majority get things exactly their own way, the place where stability can occur.

And at a time when many Americans are not optimistic about our country’s future, he was asked: “What would you want those teachers to tell students about their future in this country?”

MITCH MCCONNELL replied:

Because of our woeful ignorance of American history we always think the current period we’re in is tougher than others. We’ve had nothing like the Civil War period. We haven’t had a single incident where a Congressman from South Carolina came over and almost beat to death a Senator from Massachusetts. America’s had plenty of tough challenges. World Wars. Depressions. This is a great country. We’re going to deal with whatever our current problems are, and move on to another level. And I’m just as optimistic as I ever was that this generation is going to leave behind a better America than our parents left behind for us.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor.

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2019—Continued

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume consideration of H.R. 5515.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. DAINES). Without objection, it is so ordered.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk for the Toomey amendment No. 2700.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Senate amendment No. 2700 to amendment No. 2282, as modified, to H.R. 5515, an act to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2019 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Pat Toomey, Ted Cruz, Cindy Hyde-Smith, James Lankford, John Cornyn, Roy Blunt, Thom Tillis, Marco Rubio, Mitch McConnell, Ben Sasse, James M. Inhofe, James E. Risch, John Barrasso, Cory Gardner, John Thune, Steve Daines, Ron Johnson.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk for the Inhofe amendment No. 2282, as modified.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Senate amendment No. 2282, as modified, to H.R. 5515, an act to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2019 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Mitch McConnell, Mike Crapo, Deb Fischer, Mike Rounds, Roger F. Wicker, Ted Cruz, Cindy Hyde-Smith, James Lankford, Marco Rubio, James M. Inhofe, John Cornyn, Roy Blunt, Thom Tillis, James E. Risch, John Barrasso, Cory Gardner, John Thune.

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I send a cloture motion to the desk for the bill, H.R. 5515.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Calendar No. 442, H.R. 5515, an act to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2019 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes.

Mitch McConnell, Mike Crapo, Deb Fischer, Mike Rounds, Roger F. Wicker, Ted Cruz, Cindy Hyde-Smith, James Lankford, Marco Rubio, James M. Inhofe, John Cornyn, Roy Blunt, Thom Tillis, James E. Risch, John Barrasso, Cory Gardner, John Thune.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the mandatory quorum calls be waived.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to executive session for the consideration of the following nomination: Executive Calendar No. 835.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The clerk will report the nomination.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Christopher

Krebs, of Virginia, to be Under Secretary for National Protection and Programs, Department of Homeland Security.

Thereupon, the Senate proceeded to consider the nomination.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate vote on the nomination with no intervening action or debate; that if confirmed, the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table; that the President be immediately notified of the Senate's action; that no further motions be in order; and that any statements relating to the nomination be printed in the RECORD.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Krebs nomination?

The nomination was confirmed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate resume legislative session for a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SECOND ANNIVERSARY OF THE PULSE NIGHTCLUB SHOOTING

Mrs. FEINSTEIN. Mr. President, I rise to solemnly remember the 49 individuals who died and the 53 who were wounded at Pulse Orlando, an LGBT nightclub in Orlando, FL, 2 years ago.

I will never forget waking up in the early hours that Sunday, to hear that a 29-year-old gunman, armed with a Sig Sauer MCX assault rifle, walked into a nightclub and massacred 49 individuals in one of the deadliest mass shootings ever witnessed in our country.

To this day, so many lives impacted from the attack are still on the long road to recovery and healing. To all of the families and loved ones of those who were lost and injured during the attack, please continue to accept my deepest condolences.

Please also know I will not rest until our country is safe from gun violence. We cannot simply sit back and do nothing while mass shootings continue to devastate our communities, our places of worship, our music venues, our schools, and our workplaces.

In the days that followed the Pulse nightclub attack, I, along with Senator NELSON and a number of my colleagues, resurrected calls for legislation to allow the FBI to deny gun transfers to known or suspected terrorists who pose a public safety risk.

The legislation was a direct response to Pulse. In fact, the gunman in Orlando was ISIL-inspired and fueled by

hateful extremism and had previously been placed on the FBI's Terrorist Watchlist after earlier investigative warnings to the FBI were made about him.

And, yet, the man was allowed to walk into a gun store, pass a background check without any notification to the FBI, and walk out with a Sig Sauer MCX, a modern assault rifle with devastating killing capability.

Alarming statistics over a 10-year period demonstrate that, from February 2004 through December 2014, there were 2,233 cases in which a known or suspected terrorist identified in Federal terrorist watchlist records attempted to buy or receive a gun or explosives.

In 91 percent of these cases—a total of 2,043 different times—the known or suspected terrorist was cleared to buy or receive the firearm or explosives. In 2013 and 2014 alone, FBI data specifically showed that individuals on terrorist watchlists were involved in firearm-related background checks 485 times, and 455 of those—about 94 percent—were allowed to proceed.

It appeared there was widespread agreement to finally take action and ensure that no one who is a known or suspected terrorist, with ISIL affiliations, would be allowed to walk into a gun store and pass a Federal background check to obtain a gun. However, because of the gun lobby's strident opposition, and Republican submission to that opposition, the legislation withered and failed.

Unfortunately, the problem of mass shootings has continued to devastate this Nation. In October 2017 in Las Vegas, a single gunman with multiple assault rifles outfitted with bump stocks killed 58 people gathered to listen to a concert from his hotel room window. Numerous eyewitness accounts described the scene as a "warzone."

In Sutherland Springs, TX, in November 2017, a gunman walked into a church sanctuary on a Sunday, and killed 26 people, ranging from the elderly to young children.

Earlier this year, a 19-year-old gunman who legally purchased an AR-15 style rifle just after his 18th birthday used it to kill 14 of his former high school classmates and three educators at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, FL.

These shootings are heartbreaking. Time and again, I have stood here to ask my colleagues to show courage, to stand up to the gun lobby, and do something. These calls are only growing louder. Young people are now also taking to the streets like never before and demanding action.

They are calling for weapons of war to be taken off of our streets, and they are calling for universal background checks. They are fighting for changes to our laws because they don't want to live in a country where although we are 4.4 percent of the world's population, we possess over 44 percent of the world's firearms.