

NATIONAL DEFENSE
AUTHORIZATION ACT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, now, in the meantime, yesterday, we began moving the conference report on the National Defense Authorization Act toward the floor.

For the information of all Senators, we should expect the potential for a late night tonight and the possibility of votes tomorrow.

Back in July, the Senate passed our version of this crucial annual bill. Now our colleagues on the conference committee have done their tough job and reconciled two different approaches so we do not leave our military in the lurch.

On Tuesday, the House passed the conference report with overwhelming bipartisan support. Now it is the Senate's turn to make it an unbroken 60-year streak of passing this legislation to keep our military strong and our homeland safe.

This NDAA will unlock more than \$740 billion for the training, tools, and cutting-edge equipment that our servicemembers and civilian employees need to defend American lives and American interests. It will give our troops the 3 percent pay raise they richly deserve. It will keep our forces ready to deter China and stand strong in the Indo-Pacific, and it will secure President Trump's major progress at modernizing our capabilities, our technologies, and our strategic nuclear deterrent.

This legislation will secure wins on priorities that all of us share. It does not contain every policy that either side would like to pass, but a huge number of crucial policies are included, and a lot of bad ideas were kept out. So I would encourage all our colleagues to vote to advance this must-pass bill.

TRIBUTE TO CORY GARDNER

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, now, on one final matter, it is my honor today to pay tribute to a truly exceptional U.S. Senator, someone who arrived in this body with a full head of steam and a determination to cram as much service as possible into every day he got to wake up and serve his neighbors who sent him here.

Our good friend, CORY GARDNER, the junior Senator from Colorado, has been a man on a mission from the day he arrived. He already knew the institution. He was already one of the highest energy high-achievers that anybody who knew him had ever met. So he got to work, and he spent 6 years delivering a dizzying list of accomplishments.

If you have heard about CORY GARDNER's early days, you know that his high-speed, can-do attitude is nothing new. Case in point, one evening, when CORY was a boy, he and his friends got tired of their hoop sessions ending at sundown because the public basketball court lacked sufficient lighting. The group of friends considered how to rem-

edy this. CORY's dad happened to be a town councilman. So a little government relations took place right around the dinner table.

Well, no Senator who CORY ever pressed for a vote will be surprised to hear that the lighting infrastructure was soon adjusted, and the kids could take their pickup games into prime time.

So young CORY was no stranger to persistence or public service, but it was in high school that he scored an opportunity to taste a level beyond Yuma's local government. He won admission to the U.S. Senate Youth Program. It is a scholarship that brings promising students from around the country to these halls for a quick immersion experience.

Teenaged CORY GARDNER liked the looks of this place. He made a mental note. By the way, to this day, CORY, along with his fellow alumna, Senator COLLINS, continue to make sure that special experience is paid forward.

It didn't take CORY long to come back and begin strolling these hallways for real. After earning honors at Colorado State and a law degree from CU Boulder, he wound up working for our former colleague Senator Wayne Allard—and rising quickly through the ranks.

In short order, he developed a reputation as a highly effective advocate for Coloradans. In fact, he was so well liked, so effective, and so thoroughly the proud son of Yuma that folks started to wonder if it wasn't time for CORY to put his own name on a door somewhere. So it wasn't long before the men and women of Colorado's State House District 63 found out firsthand what happens when you hire CORY GARDNER to fight on your behalf. You get results big time.

Not much later, his neighbors then gave CORY a new assignment here in Congress. Again, Congressman GARDNER didn't just meet the bar as one out of 435. He excelled as a powerful, energetic voice on the most consequential issues. He brought home one win after another when it really mattered.

It didn't take long before another promotion came calling, and so, appropriately enough, the Senate's freshman class of 2014 included a new member from the land of "14ers"—what Coloradans call their peaks higher than 14,000 feet. CORY was already accustomed to altitude.

So here in this upper Chamber, Senator GARDNER hit the ground sprinting. I believe he has authored 11 standalone bills that have been signed into law in just 6 years. Without CORY's tireless work and his travels to the four corners of Colorado and beyond, the biggest conservation bill in a generation—the Great American Outdoors Act—would not have become law.

There has been his key role in the Supreme Court confirmation of fellow Coloradan Neil Gorsuch, his mission to move the Bureau of Land Management to Grand Junction, and, of course, the nuts-and-bolts constituent work that

CORY and his staff are famous for mastering.

This not-so-junior Senator has used Colorado values to improve Washington and Washington influence to advance his home State.

He dived head first into his leadership role on the East Asia Subcommittee on Foreign Relations. His work with regional allies helped drive the Senate to approve meaningful sanctions against North Korea, and the impact of the Asia Reassurance Initiative should echo long after all of us here today have left this scene.

The litany of CORY's work just simply does not end. There is the new, nationwide three-digit suicide prevention hotline. There is the fact that this freshman not only scrapped over a national defense issue with our late colleague Chairman John McCain—talk about fearlessness—but that he somehow emerged mostly unscathed and with a win on space launch vehicles to show for it.

But, like I said, one of the best aspects of CORY's operation is his almost obsessive focus on looking out for his people—one family and one story at a time.

That is why it is impossible to give a speech on Senator GARDNER without working your way to another name, Don Stratton.

When Don was first met with our colleague, the 95-year-old Navy veteran was living with his wife in Colorado Springs. But the story began 76 years earlier, when he was among the fortunate few sailors to survive the bombing of the USS Arizona at Pearl Harbor.

At 19, Don had survived severe burns but insisted on returning to combat with the fleet. After the war, he raised a family and wrote a book about his experiences. But Don's request to Senator GARDNER wasn't anything for himself. It concerned a comrade who had saved his life that day 79 years ago this very week.

At risk to himself, a sailor named Joe George had literally thrown the lifeline that brought Don and five shipmates to safety. But Joe's lifesaving efforts had gone unrecognized before his death.

For years, Don didn't even know who had saved him. So once he found out, Don Stratton made it his mission to ensure our Nation formalized our gratitude for his guardian angel.

Let's just say that the Strattons picked the right State to retire in. Colorado's junior Senator was on the case. CORY and his staff waded through tangles of bureaucracy. They appealed decisions all the way to the Secretary of Defense. And you better believe they secured that Bronze Star for PO1 Joe George, with the "V" device for valor to boot.

Don passed away earlier this year. By all accounts, he and his family had come to regard Senator GARDNER not just as an incredible advocate but as a true friend.

Now, in fairness, this same eagerness and almost maniacal problem-solving

can also get CORY in the occasional pickle. I remember recently that just months after the Senator was sworn in, he and I were on a codel together in the Middle East. I think the itinerary was something like eight countries in 6 days.

At one point, we were waiting to meet with a foreign leader. As everyone else was just waiting patiently in this grand palace, CORY spots what looks like a stray piece of paper lying on the floor. Earnestly thinking he should leave the place better than he found it, CORY bends over and picks up the trash—except, it wasn't trash. Just then, the Monarch rolls in with a color guard—a color guard that is looking anxiously for the floor marker that was supposed to indicate where to stop marching. Luckily, the only diplomatic fallout was a good laugh by all.

Actually, good laughs tend to follow CORY in his wake. Our colleague finds humor in the “everyday” like few can and shares it freely.

I understand one of his favorite stories concerns a chat in the well with yours truly and former Senator Orrin Hatch. CORY was filling me in on his efforts to legalize marijuana in States like his. Orrin comes by, and sensing an ally, I pulled him in. I said:

Orrin, is this true? What the heck is going on out West?

Without missing a beat, our friend from Utah, a member of the LDS Church, shook his head sadly and said: “First, it was tea. Then, coffee. And now this!”

CORY's version of this story comes complete with his finest Hatch and McConnell impersonations. Believe me, he has the voices down pat.

For 6 years, Coloradans have been represented by this remarkable person who lives and works with relentless focus and infectious joy: globe-trotting diplomacy, a thick stack of signature bills signed into law, and generational accomplishments that were only possible because he was here.

CORY likes to say himself: “Not bad for a boy from Yuma, CO!” We know what he means, but I have to observe that CORY's roots and his accomplishments are not in conflict—quite the contrary. It is only because CORY GARDNER is exactly who he is that he is able to do what he does.

CORY, everyone knows darn well your transition is no “retirement.” This is a brief pause between great chapters. I bet Jaime will call it a victory if she, Alyson, Thatcher, and Caitlyn can just get you to sit still—just sit still—and stay home through the holidays.

But we all know it will take about 5 minutes before you have found a dozen new ways to keep doing big things, winning victories on behalf of others, and paying forward the ways in which you have been blessed. Colorado and your country aren't finished with you yet, not by a long shot. So thank you for everything. We will miss you badly around here, but we can't wait to see what course you chart next.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION

NATIONAL DEFENSE AUTHORIZATION ACT FOR FISCAL YEAR 2021—Conference Report—Resumed

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will resume consideration of the conference report to accompany H.R. 6395, which will be stated by title.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

The committee of conference on disagreeing votes of the two Houses on the amendments of the Senate to the bill (H.R. 6395), to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2021 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, having met, have agreed that the House recede from its disagreement to the amendment of the Senate and agree to the same with an amendment and the Senate agree to the same, signed by a majority of the conferees on the part of both Houses.

(The conference report is printed in the House proceedings of the RECORD of December 3, 2020.)

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, with each passing day, we get another round of news underscoring how costly this pandemic has been. Yesterday, over 3,000 Americans—3,000—died from COVID-19, the highest single-day death toll to date.

If you were making a list of some of the deadliest days in American history, your mind would jump to Gettysburg, Antietam, Pearl Harbor, or 9/11. You can now add to that somber list last Thursday, Wednesday, last Tuesday, last Friday, and yesterday. Each day, nearly 2,500 Americans or more lost their lives to COVID in the course of a single day.

Now time is running out for Congress to finish our most pressing priority: passing an emergency COVID relief bill to help American families in need.

Right now, there is one clear path to getting an outcome: a bipartisan group of Senators and House Members who have reached an initial agreement on another emergency relief bill. In the spirit of compromise and for the sake of getting something done for the American people, Speaker PELOSI and I have endorsed those efforts as a framework for a final bill.

Everyone knows that this bipartisan proposal is the only real game in town at the moment, the only proposal with enough bipartisan support to, hopefully, pass both Houses of Congress before the end of the year. Everyone knows that, it seems, except Leader McCONNELL, who continues to stand in the way of bipartisan progress and who seems to wake up each morning with a new round of outlandish reasons why Democrats are somehow to blame for all the world's ills.

As the bipartisan group of Senators continue to work toward a final agreement, I want to address an incredibly false equivalency that has been drawn between two provisions: providing aid to State and local services—essential State and local services—and granting sweeping immunity to corporations that put their workers in harm's way during the pandemic.

You will hear voices say: Democrats want to fund State and local services while Republicans—that is, Leader McCONNELL—want a corporate liability shield. Each side wants something that the other side doesn't want to accept. But as I said, this is a false equivalency, incredibly false, for two reasons.

First, State and local aid has broad bipartisan support, totally unlike the Republican leader's liability provision, which is expressly partisan. Let me say that again because it is important. There is strong bipartisan support for State and local aid. There is not the same broad bipartisan support for sweeping corporate immunity.

Second, the two policies are not remotely equivalent in terms of importance or relevance to what is going on in our country right now. When we talk about providing Federal aid so the States don't have to cut essential services, we are talking about saving lives, and we are talking about saving jobs. We are talking about boosting the economy. According to the Congressional Budget Office, money for State and local government creates the best bang for the buck for the economy from any spending Congress is considering.

State and local aid is a policy with a nationwide reach. It would solve a real, immediate problem. On the other hand, when Republicans talk about giving corporate indemnity, they are talking about a solution in search of a problem. To date, there have been 20—only 20-some-odd personal injury lawsuits filed in the entire country.

The bottom line is, one provision solves a real problem in our country; the other does not. The two sides are not remotely equivalent, and it is not a trade that makes any sense in terms of the well-being of the American people.

Now, I know the Republican leader and Senate Republicans want to help small businesses and re-up the popular PPP to help prevent businesses from folding and American workers from being laid off. So do I. So do Democrats. Well, guess what. State and local relief is also about American workers