

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

AMERICAN WORKERS

Mr. BROWN. Mr. President, this spring, I was talking with a grocery store worker in Ohio, who told me: "They call me essential, but I feel expendable." That grocery store worker and thousands of others who are on the frontlines of this pandemic risk their lives so that Americans can keep food on their tables and get their packages delivered. They change linen in hospitals. They drive city buses or rural buses. They stock shelves in supermarkets.

When these workers go home at night, having been exposed to the public pretty much their whole workday, they worry they are going to bring the virus home and infect their families.

It is essential workers keeping our society going. A number of American corporations claim to recognize this. They have run feel-good ads—at least they did early in the pandemic—saying "thank you" to essential workers, claiming these workers are the heart of their companies.

But saying "thank you" is not nearly enough. Workers don't need a PR campaign. They need fair pay and protections on the job. These corporations get positive press off their workers while too often paying them poverty wages and, in too many cases, failing to protect their safety in the workplace.

I wrote an open letter this summer to corporate executives, published in their paper of record, the Wall Street Journal. I said to these corporations: You say your workers are essential. Then treat them that way. Our economy is supposed to reward people whose talents are in high demand. That is what we are all taught. That is what you always tell us; right? These workers' skills keep our economy going. Their paychecks should reflect that.

It has been 6 months since that letter was published. It may surprise no one to learn that my phone has not been ringing off the hook with calls from CEOs who want to discuss renewed efforts to invest in their workers.

All that has changed is that corporate profits have gone up, hazard pay has disappeared, and more workers have died. Profits are up at most of the biggest companies, especially the large retail companies.

The Brookings Institution studied the 13 biggest retailers in this country and found that their earnings have shot up 39 percent compared with last year, and stock prices are up 33 percent. Guess how much wages have gone up. One dollar an hour.

The Washington Post looked at the 50 biggest corporations. Between April and September, these companies handed out more than \$240 billion—240,000 million, \$240 billion—to their stockholders through stock buybacks and dividends.

It is workers making these companies successful. It is workers risking their lives on the job, but shareholders got nearly 8 percent of the profits workers created.

Look at Amazon. The company's quarterly profits increased by a staggering 200 percent. But that same Amazon rolled back its tiny \$2-an-hour raise in June and announced a bonus of just \$300 per worker. You heard that correctly—not \$3,000 but \$300, from a company that brought in \$280 billion in revenue last year.

If even a global pandemic, where American workers have been on the frontlines—if even that—will not get corporations to rethink their business model that treats workers as expendable, then, frankly, it is time—and my colleagues should hear this—to stop letting them run this economy.

They had their chance. They failed. Just look around us. If corporate America won't deliver for its workers, it is time we step in and create a better system, centered on the dignity of work.

The American people have made it clear that they want a government that is on the side of workers. Eighty-one million voters gave Joe Biden a decisive victory of more than 7 million votes. That is a mandate for change.

In June, I laid out actions that corporations could take on their own, like raising base pay to \$15 an hour. Since they mostly refused, we should raise the Federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour.

Workers are still not safe on the job. So President Biden can immediately issue an OSHA, or Occupational Safety and Health Administration, emergency temporary standard forcing corporations to protect their workers.

Many companies still deny their employees paid sick leave, even during a pandemic. So we have to pass a national paid family leave plan.

Corporations are expanding rather than ending their exploitive "independent contractor" business model. So we are going to have to use the law to make them treat their workers as true employees. You know how they do it: Particularly large corporations will contract out custodial work, security work, and food service work in their company cafeteria, for instance. They contract it out to a private company that pays much less than the corporation pays, often wages barely above the minimum wage. Those workers should have to be treated like workers living under American labor law.

Corporations continue to coerce workers out of forming unions. So we need to pass the PRO Act—Protecting Our Right to Organize Act—to empower workers with a voice in their workplace.

The economy isn't physics. It is not governed by a scientific law outside our control. It is made up of people making choices about our values and in what kind of society we want to live.

That is the reason we have an Occupational Safety and Health Administration. It is why we have these agencies: to make sure that workers are treated fairly to begin with.

We have the power to change how the economy works so that it rewards work instead of greed. We can create more jobs at middle-class wages. We can give people power over their lives and schedules. We can expand economic security and opportunity for everyone.

Americans voted for this change. Americans aren't going to wait for corporations to reform themselves on their own. That is for sure. They never have. They never will. It is up to the rest of us to deliver for the people whom we serve and create a country where all work has dignity.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

TRIBUTE TO CORY GARDNER

Mr. MARKEY. Mr. President, it is my pleasure to honor my good friend and my colleague Senator CORY GARDNER. CORY and I were friends in the House of Representatives. Our friendship deepened in the Senate, especially after he took the reins as chair and I as the ranking member of the Subcommittee on East Asia of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in the 115th Congress.

We were unlikely partners in a lot of ways. He is a conservative Republican and I am a liberal Democrat. I know that Tom Brady is the best quarterback ever. He just might say that it is John Elway.

But like me, CORY is a pragmatist, and we did find common ground. In fact, we were a two-man legislative wrecking crew, with several credits to our names.

GARDNER-MARKEY collaborated on such hits as the Asia Reassurance Initiative Act, ARIA, sweeping Asia-focused legislation to reorient our Indo-Pacific strategy around alliances, common values, and mutual security; the Cambodia Democracy Act, to stand up for civil society the rights of a political opposition; the Taiwan International Participation Act of 2018, to signal both our commitment to the island nation and our displeasure with China's efforts to shut it out of international organizations; and the Leverage to Enhance Effective Diplomacy Act, to build the conditions for a future North Korea that no longer threatens its neighbors and the world with nuclear weapons.

With CORY as chair and myself as ranking member, we convened hearings, drafted broad legislation, hosted

foreign leaders. As the foreign policy gravitational pull rightly moved to the Indo-Pacific in recent years, CORY brought the top policymakers, human rights defenders, and government witnesses to the fourth floor of the Dirksen Senate Office Building—not exactly the Diplomatic Room of the White House.

In the 115th Congress, we held 11 hearings. It was a constant beat of meetings and hearings that CORY would be leading. I was always honored to be partnered with him in organizing those efforts.

CORY grew up on a farm, so it is no wonder that he is a workhorse. Each time he gaveled in a hearing, he was professional, prepared, good-humored. And he, on more than a few occasions, allowed particularly verbose Senators to blow past their allotted time.

Nowhere did I enjoy our work together more than in the drafting and the ultimate passage of the landmark Asia Reassurance Initiative Act. Our bill, which is now the law of the land, adopts a long-term U.S. strategy for the most consequential region in the world, the Indo-Pacific. It was a credit to our foreign policy staffs—led by Igor in CORY's staff and Zack in mine—that we were able to get it past the finish line.

A fully resourced ARIA will ensure that the United States will remain a Pacific power. Investments through ARIA offer a critical counterweight to China by helping our partners in the region build defenses and defend democracy and the rule of law.

But CORY understood passage of a law alone does not equate to the implementation of policy. When ARIA was signed into law, he and I convened a series of hearings to ensure the Departments of Defense and State and the USAID were putting resources to the challenge.

The Asia-Pacific is home to 60 percent of the world's population. This fact and the wide geographic scope of the region means that we need to respond nimbly to the latest international crisis of the day.

When North Korea policy vacillated between “fire and fury” and detente, he used the subcommittee to provide critical oversight.

When China and Hong Kong authorities turned to batons and tear gas in a futile attempt to end democratic protests, he hosted one of the architects of the student-powered Umbrella Movement, Nathan Law.

When just this past year, some wished to shake down our Japanese and South Korean allies, we partnered on two resolutions, which reaffirmed our ironclad relationships to both allies.

In his farewell address, CORY said that the pillars of the Senate Chamber are principles shared by all Americans. They are immutable. CORY, it was a pleasure to work with you these past years to also strengthen the pillars of U.S. foreign policy, standing up for human rights, our allies, and the rule of law around the world.

I hope that this son of Yuma, CO, is not finished with public service yet. I am grateful for what we accomplished together on the Asia Subcommittee and even more grateful for our friendship.

My best to Jaime and your wonderful family and to you, my friend.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

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

PREVENT GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWNS ACT

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, this all feels strangely familiar. It is the middle of December. We are facing a government shutdown, arguing behind the scenes over the final details, discussing whether we are going to do a short-term CR, wondering what is going to happen. Everyone has this sense that if we don't get the bill done by tomorrow, then we are going to end up in shutdown and all the problems that causes.

Senator HASSAN and I stand in the back and hold up our hands and say: In February of last year, we proposed a solution to this that fits this exact scenario to keep us from holding Federal workers and all of our agencies in harm's way.

The ending government shutdowns bill is designed for this moment. For whatever reason, we have not been able to agree to pass it. It is a process document. It doesn't solve all of the policy issues we have. We have real policy differences, but we should not have process differences at moments like this. It is not good for the American people. It is not good for the U.S. Senate or the U.S. Congress to stand at the precipice of a shutdown and to say: Maybe we go over; maybe we don't. Maybe we have a short-term continuing resolution; maybe we pass the 12 appropriations bills. We shouldn't ever get to that moment.

Our simple idea is not a partisan idea. Senator HASSAN and I released a simple, straightforward idea. You get to the end of the fiscal year, whenever that may be, and if we have not finished all the appropriations work, we continue working until it gets done. An automatic continuing resolution kicks in so that no Federal worker is worried that they are going to have furloughs right before Christmas; no agency is panicked about what happens next and who do I have to furlough and who do I have to keep and who is essential and who is nonessential. None of that happens. None of that waste occurs. We continue debating until we resolve the issue. That is all that it is.

We have 12 appropriations bills that are not done. Painfully, in this year of COVID, there have been only 22 total appropriations hearings in 12 months—

22. That is 12 appropriations committees, 12 months, only 22 hearings total for all of them.

We have not completed the appropriations work on time, so now we are struggling with the what-ifs. Senator HASSAN and I have a straightforward idea. Let's pass the end government shutdowns bill. Let's continue our negotiations so we don't have to be in the shadow of a shutdown again next year.

It is doable. I shouldn't be controversial. It should be obvious. When we get to a time period like this, if we are not complete, we keep working until it is done. In the meantime, we don't leave. It is the exact statement I have heard from everybody in the Chamber so far today. We need to stay until it is done. I agree. That should be the process every time we get to this moment. We stay until the work gets done. Our bill just mandates that, and it keeps us from ever having to say the word “shutdown” again.

So I would encourage this body again, as I did all of last year, as I did all of this year: Let's end government shutdowns. Let's keep debating the policy. We have differences. We know that. But let's end the thought of government shutdowns.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Michigan.

CORONAVIRUS

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, 2020 has been a year of immense challenges. We are in the middle of an unprecedented economic and public health crisis. Small businesses have been forced to shutter or are barely staying afloat. Workers are out of jobs through no fault of their own, and folks are stressed about feeding their families and keeping a roof over their heads. Healthcare workers are exhausted—pressed to their breaking points from treating patients with COVID.

But, thankfully, there is light at the end of the tunnel. With the recent FDA vaccine emergency use authorization, Michiganians and Americans are finally starting to receive much needed reinforcements to combat and to control this virus.

Although there is light at the end of the tunnel, we know the next 2 or 3 months or more are going to be difficult. We cannot let our guard down. We must continue to wear a mask, practice social distancing, and wash our hands. We all can—and we must—play an important role in defeating this virus, and we can do that if we work together.

Working together is the key to get through this pandemic. We know what happens when we work together here in this Chamber. Early on in this pandemic, we worked together to pass the CARES Act, which provided vital resources and support to keep families and workers afloat.

We worked together to pass additional aid for small businesses, for testing, for healthcare providers, and for hospitals. And, right now, we need to