**McConnell Center Archive Opening**

**Remarks of Republican Leader Mitch McConnell**

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(Words: 1,376 Approx. 10 mins)

Elaine and I share a life, and now we share an archive, and I wouldn’t have it any other way… although if this place turns out anything like our closet space at home, I might end up with the short end of the stick. Elaine is not only the love of my life, she’s also a remarkable American, and I’m so glad that more people will now have the chance to learn about her incredible life’s journey, and to be inspired by it as I have been.

Senator McCain honors us with his presence. We’re so fortunate on this Veterans Day to have the most famous veteran in America here with us, to be inspired by his story, his sacrifice, and his example of service and duty. Thank you so much, John, for spending this time with us, and for your continued service to our nation [*Lead applause here*].

Our archivist, Debbie Skaggs, didn’t know what she was getting into. I think it first dawned on her at a recent football game when she asked me if I had a momento from college that she could put in the archives. I turned to her and I said, “Debbie, I’ve never thrown anything away…” We were looking for the perfect person for the job, and we found her.

President Ramsey has done such a marvelous job during his time here. He has been completely committed to making U of L one of the nation’s premier schools. As a result of his vision and efforts, there’s no doubt he’s achieving his goal. And it’s really because of him that we’re standing here today. So I want to thank you, President Ramsey, for everything you’ve done for this university and for Kentucky.

I also want to thank the director of the McConnell Center, Dr. Gary Gregg. But first let me just say a word about the program that he runs.

You know, when I came out of college, I didn’t really have any connections. I didn’t go to Harvard. I hadn’t seen much of the world outside Kentucky. I just kind of had to figure it all out. So we had this idea some years back of seeing what we could do to give students in Kentucky the same kinds of opportunities that kids at traditional elite schools have. And just like that the McConnell Center was born.

We don’t ask these students what their political views are, nor do we care. We don’t ask them to become political science majors. There’s only one requirement – that they be from Kentucky, and that they have a record of excellence and leadership. Beyond that, we give them tools they need to nurture their talents, and hope they continue to do well in school and stick around afterward to help lead Kentucky into the future.

Well, I look around today at the young people who’ve come through this program of ours, and I have to tell you, what we’ve done here has exceeded my wildest dreams. What started out as a little scholarship program has grown into something truly remarkable. And being a part of this program, seeing the success of these students, has been one of the most gratifying and humbling experiences of my life.

By now, 213 students have been a part of the McConnell Scholars program. Most of them have stayed in Kentucky, and most will tell you that the program was nothing short of a life-changing experience. We put a book together a few years back about the Center, and when you read the words of the students themselves, you can’t help but feel like we’ve accomplished something great; students who say that the world was opened up to them, that they were afforded opportunities they never would have had.

There are many good centers out there at various universities that do very good things. But there’s simply no question that the singular focus on undergraduates at our center is unmatched in all America. And Gary Gregg has been uniquely qualified to run it. He’s passionate about learning and about teaching others. He really cares for the well being of the students. He’s made this place what it is today. He deserves the credit.

If you’re looking for a model of what we’ve been trying to do at the McConnell Center, you could do no better than to look at the story of one of Kentucky’s favorite sons. It’s really amazing to consider, but the man who wrote the Gettysburg Address was raised by a father who couldn’t even sign his own name.

How in the world did that happen?

Well, somewhere along the way, someone raised Abraham Lincoln’s sights, someone lifted his horizons; someone helped him out. That’s the kind of thing we’ve been trying to do at the McConnell Center. And I think we should be proud of that. I’m proud of it. And I’m proud that these new archives will help the McConnell Center expand its reach and its mission even further into the Commonwealth and the nation.

This town has meant so much to me over the years. I may spend most of my work days in the Senate, but all the strands of my life really converge here. My family lived just a few miles away in the South end… As a kid, I played on the fields there… My high school was and still is right across the street… My interest in politics was awakened in the classrooms of this campus… I can’t tell you how many weekends I’ve spent here over the years cheering for the Cardinals… and my thoughts, as I’ve said, are never far from the students and the work that we’re doing at the McConnell Center.

And that’s why this event isn’t really about one man or one woman’s life or career. It’s about the people and the places that make a journey like mine and Elaine’s possible at all. That’s what the McConnell Center is about. That’s what John McCain never tires of telling us. That’s what U of L showed me. And that, my friends, is what American is all about – the promise that opportunity for all who have the desire to achieve it and who’ve had the good fortune of encountering kind and generous people along the way to make their dreams possible.

So today I’m filled with gratitude to all the people who’ve given me the opportunity to serve – my wife and family, my friends, my teachers, the people of Kentucky, and my Republican colleagues, who’ve placed their trust in me by making me their leader in the Senate. [*Pause*].

… which brings me back to my day job, and to another important purpose of these archives.

You know, we tend to focus on the presidency, because we only have one president at a time. But it’s important to remember that the founders gave us three equal branches; and in the Constitution, the legislative branch comes first. It’s my hope that this center and centers like it across the country will help to educate people about the importance and the purpose of Congress, and the value of our two-party system, which forces us to make the compromises that often lead to a better product for the American people.

God willing, I intend to spend many more years in the Senate. I have more enthusiasm for my work than ever, and I feel very much at the top of my game. We’re doing important work in Washington, and I’m determined to continue to be the best possible party leader and best possible senator I can be for the people of Kentucky. I continue to be humbled by their trust.

These archives are one small way of preserving a small part of our collective history. And it’s my hope that learning about Kentucky’s past and the ideal of public service will lead many more people young and old to realize that they have a say, and a stake, in the future of Kentucky and out nation – so that at some point in their lives, they can feel at the end of the day, as I often do, that maybe they’ve made a difference.

Thank you.