

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, yesterday, the Senate confirmed John Ring to the National Labor Relations Board. Now the NLRB is, once again, fully staffed and ready to call balls and strikes fairly for America's workers.

This morning, we confirmed Patrick Pizzella, the President's highly qualified nominee, to fill the No. 2 job at the Department of Labor. Mr. Pizzella brings a sterling reputation and an impressive resume. It includes time at the GSA, the Small Business Administration, the Department of Education, the Federal Housing Finance Board, and OPM.

Even with 8 years as the Assistant Secretary of Labor for Administration and Management and 4 years as a Senate-confirmed member of the Federal Labor Relations Authority, this dedicated public servant saw his confirmation process play out in a manner that has become all too familiar—months of waiting on the Senate calendar, months of obstruction by our Democratic colleagues, months of needless vacancy in this critical agency position. After this morning's vote, Mr. Pizzella can finally get to work, but the same story of obstruction applies to the next nomination on the slate as well.

Andrew Wheeler is ready and waiting—and waiting and waiting—to clock in as Deputy Administrator of the EPA. His qualifications are beyond question. He has won the support of the American Farm Bureau Federation and has won praise from both sides of the aisle. Mr. Wheeler's former boss, our colleague Senator INHOFE, said, "There is no one more qualified." Our former colleague, Senator Lieberman, called Mr. Wheeler "fair and professional" and said, "I hope his nomination will receive . . . fair consideration by the Senate."

Delaying key executive nominees does not come cost-free to the country. The Deputy Administrator is the EPA's chief operating officer. He plays a major role in protecting America's air and water, while minimizing unnecessary obstacles for workers and job creators. The American people deserve to have him and other key officials in place.

I mentioned yesterday that our Democratic colleagues are literally setting records. Just 15 months in, they have chosen to force—listen to this—84 cloture votes on President Trump's executive and judicial nominees. Eighty-four. That is more than three times as many nominee cloture votes as happened in the first 2 years of Presidents Obama, President Bush, and President Clinton combined. Combined, 84 cloture votes is more than 3 times as many cloture votes as happened in the first 2 years of President Obama, Bush, and Clinton altogether. Many of the nominees were then confirmed nearly unanimously.

I hope these stalling tactics will end soon because the personnel business isn't going anywhere. Today, in fact,

CIA Director Mike Pompeo is appearing before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee for the first time as the President's nominee for Secretary of State. He is yet another qualified nominee who deserves fair and swift consideration for our country's sake.

For now, I meant what I said on Monday. We will remain in session as long as it takes to process this week's slate of nominees. After Mr. Wheeler, we still have two judicial nominees: Rebecca Grady Jennings for the Western District of Kentucky and John Broomes for the District of Kansas. One way or another, the easy way or the hard way, this Senate will get the people's business done this week.

PRO-GROWTH AGENDA

Mr. President, on another matter, I have been speaking all week about the stark difference between the Obama administration's economic legacy and the pro-growth agenda this Republican Congress and Republican President have been putting in place.

For 8 years, our Democratic friends' so-called economic recovery hardly made it past our Nation's biggest and richest cities. Democratic policies largely failed the millions of working Americans who live in our small towns and suburbs, smaller cities and rural areas—not so with this Republican Congress and this Republican President. Already, our inclusive opportunity agenda is bringing new energy, new optimism, and new growth to all of those forgotten parts of our country.

On my recent trip back to Kentucky, I heard what I have been hearing for months now. I heard how tax reform is helping bourbon producers compete, create jobs, and reinvigorate their local economies. I heard how employers in the State are reinvesting in their workers by offering bonuses or looking to increase hiring. I heard how farm families are breathing easier after regulatory reforms that will keep the government from invading every puddle, ditch, and pothole in America.

These signs of progress just confirm what Republicans have said all along: that middle-class families flourish when the IRS takes less of what they earn; that American entrepreneurs thrive when we scrub the regulatory rust off our economy and give farmers, ranchers local communities, community banks, and small businesses more say over their own affairs; that good things happen when we just get Washington out of the way.

Our policies are delivering real prosperity for Americans in all kinds of communities, so it is no surprise that a recent study found that last year, rural areas outpaced the rest of the country in relative job creation.

These are promising signs and long over due, but, of course, there is a lot more work to do.

HEMP FARMING ACT

Mr. President, that is why a number of us have been working hard on legislation that would get government out of the way in another important re-

spect. As the tobacco industry has changed, some farmers in States like Kentucky have been searching for a new crop that can support their families and grow our agricultural economy. Many believe they found such a product—industrial hemp—but the Federal Government has stood in the way. It is time to change that. That is why some colleagues and I are introducing legislation that will modernize Federal law in this area and empower American farmers to explore this promising new market.

I want to thank my fellow Kentuckian, Congressman JAMIE COMER, and my good friend and colleague from Oregon, Senator WYDEN, for their leadership on this issue, as well as Senator MERKLEY for his support.

During the recent State work period, I stood with Kentucky's agriculture commissioner, Ryan Quarles, to announce my intention to introduce new legislation on this subject. Today we are introducing the Hemp Farming Act of 2018. It will build on the success of recent pilot programs and take a big step toward growth and more innovation. As I travel across Kentucky, I have spoken with farmers, manufacturers, and small business owners. Time and again, they shared with me their enthusiasm for hemp's potential to reenergize agricultural communities and provide a new spark to the U.S. economy. This bill will help make that potential a reality.

But first, let's remember how we got to this point. In 2014, I secured language in the farm bill that established hemp pilot programs in States that allow hemp research. The results have been extraordinary.

In Kentucky, hemp is proving useful across a wide variety of innovative products. Its fibers are being added to concrete and home insulation. Its extracts are being researched for potential health benefits. Some breweries in Kentucky have even crafted hemp-infused beer. Last year alone, the hemp industry added 81 new jobs in Kentucky and yielded more than \$16 million for Kentucky farmers. That is just under Kentucky's research pilot program.

Of course, that is just one State. Already, in fact, around \$600 million in hemp products are sold each year here in the United States. Due to current laws, much of this hemp has to be imported. That cuts out our American farmers. It is time for that to change. The legislation we are introducing today will solve this problem and get the Federal Government out of the way of this promising market.

The Hemp Farming Act of 2018 will do the following:

First and foremost, our bill will finally legalize hemp and remove it from the list of controlled substances. By recognizing the difference in statute between hemp and its illicit cousin, we can remove much of the confusion facing farmers, producers, and State agencies.

Second, the legislation will allow States to become the primary regulators of hemp, if they can develop a plan to properly monitor its production.

Kentucky Agriculture Commissioner Quarles is a strong supporter of hemp and its potential, and under his guidance, the industry is already growing and maturing in Kentucky through the pilot program. He and State leaders like him around the country are well positioned to develop their own policies and take the industry to the next level. If States are unable or choose not to create their own regulatory plan, the U.S. Department of Agriculture will provide the necessary oversight.

Third, this bill will also allow researchers to apply for competitive Federal grants from the USDA, so we can continue to see more innovation with respect to this extraordinarily versatile crop.

Finally, our legislation will also explicitly make hemp farmers eligible to apply for crop insurance. That will enable farmers to build out a steady business model and put it on a level playing field with other crops.

I look forward to continuing to work with colleagues here in Congress and hemp farmers in Kentucky and throughout the Nation on this legislation.

Again, I particularly thank Senator WYDEN and Senator MERKLEY for working with me on this bipartisan bill. I also thank Congressman COMER, a longtime advocate for hemp—who, by the way, is a former agriculture commissioner in Kentucky—for taking the lead in introducing companion legislation over in the House. I will be proud to continue to work with him on this issue.

Today is a promising step. I am hopeful that together we can get this bill across the finish line and onto the President's desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, the majority leader said that this is a promising day, and I would just say that I think it is more than that. It is really a milestone to have the majority leader of the Senate working with a bipartisan group of us to lift a restriction that is anti-farmer, certainly anti-consumer, and anti-common sense. This industrial hemp restriction really, in my view, is working in needless hardships from sea to shining sea.

I am going to take a minute to build on some of the majority leader's remarks.

Colleagues may have heard me say that, for me, this issue goes back several years. My wife was pregnant, and she and I headed from our house in Southeast Portland, and we went off to the nearby Costco store. We were walking through the aisles, and we came across a huge bag of hemp hearts. It said: Great fiber. Terrific source of protein. A variety of different attributes

were spelled out on this package. Good for your heart, and good for your blood pressure.

I looked at the package, and the package clearly indicated that it had been grown outside the United States. So I said to my wife, who is a businesswoman and savvy about such matters: What would be wrong with saying that if you can buy it in a major supermarket in America, our farmers ought to be able to grow it in America?

She said: Well, dear, that just sounds way too logical for what goes on in your world.

I think what the leader has said—and I just want to back this up with a little more detail—is that the current policy is somehow based on the idea that hemp is a dangerous drug, meaning that if you look at the way some people have attacked this idea in the past, that was always the heart of it, that hemp was a dangerous drug.

Hemp does not produce the high associated with marijuana. The only thing you are going to accomplish by smoking hemp is wasting your breath, wasting your time, and wasting lighter fluid. That is pretty much what you would accomplish. This misguided policy of treating hemp like it is some kind of peril, an imminent threat to the American people, is, I think, a mistake, and it means that the hemp products that are lined up on shelves all across America simply aren't going to be fully American-made.

Senator MCCONNELL and Senator PAUL have heard that from farmers in Kentucky, and Senator MERKLEY and I have heard that from farmers in Oregon. That is why it is so important that we move to a system that is built on common sense, something that will be good for farmers, and something that will be good for consumers and certainly offer additional consumer choice.

If I might build on the now sort of memorialized words of Nancy Wyden, because when we talked about, hey, if you can buy it in a market in Oregon, the farmers ought to be able to grow it—I think that is a pretty good watchword for this bipartisan bill we are undertaking.

I look forward to working closely with you, Mr. Leader. We are obviously going to be working with Chairman ROBERTS and Senator STABENOW, the ranking Democratic leader. This is long, long overdue.

As you noted, we have bipartisan supporters, and we are going to pull out all the stops to get this legislation passed. I think I mentioned to the majority leader that those who have been involved in this effort—and it has been a really impressive coalition of farmers, health advocates, and others—are watching the Senate this morning. They are saying that the Senate has finally come to understand what is relevant for this century. The policies that have been so flawed in the past are sort of outdated relics of yesterday, and I am pleased that Senator

MERKLEY and I can join you and Senator PAUL. We will have colleagues on both sides involved in this legislation. It is long overdue.

I thank the leader.

I yield the floor.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I thank my friend from Oregon. I think this is a great project we can work on together.

During the recent break, I met with a lot of farmers in Kentucky. Since farmers demographically tend to be older in most of our States, I thought it was particularly noteworthy that there were a lot of young, enthusiastic farmers, including research people from the University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, with genuine enthusiasm about what this could mean to help reinvigorate a rural economy in Kentucky that is not what it used to be when we had tobacco as our No. 1 cash crop. That has faded, and it should have, given the health implications of it.

This is an opportunity for us to do something together, to do something important for rural America, and I look forward to working with my friend and colleague to achieve success.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

RUSSIA INVESTIGATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, over the past 2 weeks, we have seen increasingly worrisome signs that President Trump is seriously considering firing the special counsel in charge of the investigation into Russia's meddling in the 2016 election. Equally troubling is the possibility of the President firing the Deputy Attorney General who oversees that investigation in order to install someone who would dismiss Mr. Mueller or otherwise impede or shut down the investigation.

Let me be clear. Firing Mr. Rosenstein would be as great an injury to our democracy as firing Mr. Mueller. Mr. Rosenstein, by all accounts, since being appointed by President Trump, has followed the letter of the law. There is no conduct the President or anyone else can point to that would suggest Mr. Rosenstein went beyond DOJ regulations or otherwise abused his position. He has dutifully done his job. When he approved Mr. Mueller's referral to the U.S. attorney in the Southern District, it was simply because he was provided sufficient evidence that Mr. Mueller had uncovered a potential crime. It doesn't matter if it upsets President Trump; Mr. Rosenstein was following the facts and the law. It is the obligation of a Justice Department official when he or she sees evidence of a crime to pursue it without fear, without favor. That is what Rosenstein was doing, and somehow President Trump doesn't grasp the rudiments of our democracy and our system of laws.

Instead, President Trump seems to have the view that the Justice Department exists to protect his interests and