

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 yesteryear, 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

prosecute his enemies. But in the long history of our grand, wonderful country—God's noble experiment, as the Founding Fathers called it, and it still is today—that has never been what the Justice Department has stood for. It is an independent Federal agency tasked with following the law wherever it leads, free of considerations of politics or power. Mr. Rosenstein is acting in line with that long and great tradition, and it is no reason—none at all—for the President to fire him.

My friends on the other side of the aisle know, just as well as we do, that firing Mr. Rosenstein or Mr. Mueller would precipitate a constitutional crisis. Our constitutional order is built upon a bedrock faith in the rule of law, of equality under the law. No person—not even the President—can subvert that principle for his or her political interests or needs.

Let me remind everyone that the investigation is not a witch hunt, as the President keeps tweeting it is. It has resulted in multiple indictments and guilty pleas. By definition, that is not a witch hunt. The Trump administration itself leveled sanctions against Russians based on information obtained as a result of the Russia probe. So if the President's own administration, separate from Mueller, leveled sanctions against the Russians using information that Mueller has gotten, how can he then proceed to call it a witch hunt? It just doesn't add up.

The investigation concerns the national security of the United States. If the President were to try to shut it down for personal, political reasons, there is no doubt we would face a constitutional crisis.

So let's make this simple. The consequences of firing Mr. Rosenstein, Mr. Mueller, or issuing pardons would be dire for our democracy. We have clear evidence from the President himself that each of those things is a possibility. President Trump basically mused about it on national television.

Every Democrat and every Republican, regardless of politics, party, or ideology, should stand up and say that what the President is considering is not only wrong but a real threat to the constitutional order of this government. Once they admit that, what rational person would not want to take steps to prevent a constitutional crisis from happening now, before the President acts precipitously and against the whole meaning of our democracy? We, in Congress, have the power to prevent that constitutional crisis and to do it right away. We have the power to protect the special counsel's investigation. Only the Deputy Attorney General can fire the special counsel and only for cause.

A bipartisan group of Senators, including Senators GRAHAM and TILLIS on the Republican side and BOOKER and COONS on the Democratic side, have come up with legislation that would allow the special counsel to appeal a firing to a panel of independent judges

under an expedited procedure to determine if Mr. Mueller were fired for cause. If he weren't fired for cause, the special counsel would be reinstituted immediately. That makes eminent sense. The bipartisan legislation would simply provide a legal avenue to reinforce existing procedures and assure that the grand tradition of rule of law is maintained.

Chairman GRASSLEY and Ranking Member FEINSTEIN have agreed to hold a hearing and mark up this legislation. I applaud them both for it and urge the members of the Judiciary Committee to approve this legislation without watering it down or weakening it with amendments. We should pass it out of committee. Leader MCCONNELL should bring it to the floor of the Senate quickly, where I believe it would pass with a very large majority, and we should pressure our colleagues in the House to do the same. It is my view that if the bill came to the floor and passed the Senate by a significant majority, the House would follow because the pressure would be enormous.

The rule of law, quite simply, should not be a partisan issue. It must not be a partisan issue. We cannot ever let it become a partisan issue. The last time it was at risk under President Nixon's administration, Republicans stepped up to the plate, and they went down in history as very admirable. I hope they will do it again. The Congress should speak loudly and soon by passing this legislation in both Chambers.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask to continue my remarks for a few minutes on another subject.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I apologize to my colleague from Delaware.

REPUBLICAN TAX BILL

Mr. President, on a second issue, on the issue of taxes, since the beginning of the tax debate, Republicans have insisted their bill is about cutting taxes for working Americans. This is despite the fact that the bill would direct 83 percent of the benefits to the top 1 percent of Americans. Despite the fact that they made corporate tax cuts permanent but let individual tax cuts expire, Republicans said that middle-class workers were the focus. Democrats warned that if you give big corporations, powerful corporations, and the wealthiest of Americans the overwhelming lion's share of the tax cuts, the corporations would do what they have always done when they have higher profits—distribute it amongst themselves. Unfortunately, we said it at the time, and I wish we were wrong, but our warnings proved prescient.

Almost every day, we hear a new story about a corporation using the savings from the Republican tax bill to purchase its own stock. That is called a stock buyback. What does it do? It

boosts the corporation's stock price to provide a reward for the wealthy CEOs and top executives who have the shares and shareholders, the vast majority of whom are wealthy Americans and a third of whom are not even Americans. They get the breaks.

A stock buyback is designed to feather the nest and increase the power and support among shareholders of the CEO. When you buy back stock, you use that money—instead of investing it in workers, instead of investing it in a new plant, instead of investing it in training—to decrease the number of shares, which raises the value of the other shares. So who benefits? The shareholders. Who are the shareholders? They are the CEOs and major officers of the corporations, so they are not doing this without self-interest.

As I said, 80 percent of the stocks in America are owned by the top 10 percent of the wealthy. It is not very good.

Let me give you an example. These are the kinds of things that are happening daily. Devon Energy announced a billion-dollar stock buyback in March, and 2 days ago they said that they are laying off 9 percent of their workers “to streamline operations and boost the shale oil producer's sagging returns and stock price.” They are not atypical.

According to JUST Capital, 60 percent of the money in the Republican tax break went to shareholders, who tend to be the wealthiest, and only 6 percent went to workers. So much for all the talk that when we gave the corporations all this money, the workers would gain most of the benefits. It has not happened.

Stock buybacks are a big reason why workers no longer see the benefits of record corporate profits. Why? Because instead of investing in corporate profits and things that benefit the long-term health of the economy and workers—higher wages, new equipment, research, development, and new hires—corporations spend the money on buybacks.

In fact, stock buybacks were illegal because they so feathered the nest of the very few, that when corporate CEOs and their board did it, they were not objective observers because they would make so much money from them. So stock buybacks were illegal until 1982, which is about the same time wages stopped increasing with corporate profits.

Senator BALDWIN has led the charge in our caucus to go back to the days before 1982. So when corporations had a lot of profits, whether through earnings, revenues, or tax breaks, they couldn't use these stock buybacks, and almost certainly a larger percentage of money would go to the workers and the middle class.

The theory behind the Republican tax bill was to allow corporations and the richest Americans to keep more of their already very great wealth, and maybe the benefits will trickle down to