

came away feeling confident that big steps forward have taken place in the last 2½ years.

Thanks in large part to these measures, the 2018 elections went more smoothly than 2016, and as we look to 2020, it is encouraging to learn how seriously the administration is taking the threat and proactively working to counter it because we know the threat is not going anywhere. Foreign adversaries are going to keep at it, so I am glad the administration is so focused on staying strong and remaining vigilant.

Of course, as I said yesterday, the roots of the issue run deeper than our elections themselves. A foreign adversary like Russia didn't just wake up one day in 2016 and decide to interfere in the American democracy. The meddling was an outgrowth of a long pattern of weakness and naivete that permeated all 8 years of the Obama administration.

Punching back against this misbehavior, and deterring future episodes like it, has also meant taking broad steps to strengthen America's posture abroad and to get more realistic about our relationship with the Russians. Obviously, nearly 30 Russians and Russian corporations have been indicted by the Special Counsel for election meddling.

More broadly, we have a new national security strategy—an improved roadmap for our global presence that takes seriously the need to check great power competitors like Russia and China.

We are recommitting to the alliances that preserve American values around the world, reforming NATO to meet 21st century threats, and equipping our allies and partners who are on the frontlines of Russia's geopolitical prospecting. Congress and the administration have worked together to restore our Armed Forces and unwind harmful funding restrictions that cut readiness and limited our commanders. So not just our efforts on election security but, really, our entire foreign policy have made strides under the leadership of this administration.

To conclude, yesterday's briefing made it clear that our work has led to huge progress—huge progress—but the work certainly isn't over. Leaders across government are continuing to explore and repair potential vulnerabilities and increase cooperation ahead of the 2020 Presidential election. Congress will certainly continue to monitor this closely while resisting any efforts to use the failures of the past to justify sweeping federalizations of election law, as some on the other side have consistently sought to do.

Let me say that again. Congress will certainly continue to monitor this closely while resisting any efforts to use the failures of the past to justify sweeping federalizations of election law, as some on the other side have consistently sought to do.

Make no mistake, many of the proposals labeled by Democrats to be

“election security” are measures, in fact, for election reform that are part of the wish list of the left called the Democrat politician protection act.

What they do is ignore the great work this administration has done and sweep under the rug the necessary measures this Chamber has passed.

But speaking broadly, I think all Americans should remember this: What Russia really set out to do was to sow division, spark doubt, and trigger a crisis of confidence in our country that would extend far beyond the actual actions that they undertook.

So as I have said before, as we continue taking action and shoring up our defenses, it is also vital that we not fall into precisely—precisely—the trap that Putin and company have laid. It is vital that Americans not take the bait on fear and division and ultimately do Russia's work for them.

Our country is strong. American democracy is strong. Our elections are already safer and more secure, and the important work continues. Our adversaries will not let up, so we are not letting up either.

#### NOMINATIONS

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, on another matter, all week the Senate has continued our productivity in overcoming partisan opposition and confirming the President's well-qualified nominees for important offices.

We have confirmed the newest judge on the Ninth Circuit. Yesterday we confirmed three district judges by overwhelming bipartisan margins—78 to 15, 80 to 14, and 85 to 10. Those are the margins on three district judges. Clearly, we are not exactly talking about radioactive, controversial nominees here, not when 78 votes for confirmation is the low end.

Nevertheless, as has become typical over the past 2½ years, our Democratic colleagues insisted on cloture votes to cut off debate before we could confirm any of them. In fact, we have yet to voice-vote a single judicial nominee this entire Congress. We haven't voice-voted a single judicial nominee this entire Congress.

It is really a shame. It is not the precedent the Senate ought to be setting for these lower tier nominations. Of course, we have confirmed them nonetheless.

Before the end of this week, the Senate will have done the same for three other lower level nominees to the executive branch.

Weeks like this were impossible before my Republican colleagues and I did the right thing for the institution a few months back and moved the Senate back toward our historic norms for nominations of this sort. We argued that Senate Democrats were mindlessly obstructing even the least controversial nominees just for obstruction's sake.

Our colleagues across the aisle insisted, no, the majority would be ram-

ming through these extreme individuals and cutting off intense debate that these extreme nominees deserve. Well, who is right? Well, one more time for good measure: 78 to 15, 80 to 14, and 85 to 10. Enough said.

It is particularly ironic that some of my friends across the aisle elect to complain that the Senate is spending too much time on nominations—the Presiding Officer has heard that—spending too much time on nominations. I am not making this up. We actually hear protestations from the Democratic side that confirming these men and women is taking too long, as though it weren't totally obvious to everyone that their own unprecedented delaying tactics are the only reason these nominees have not been quickly confirmed in big batches on a voice vote.

It is quite the two-step: Democrats systematically drag their heels for 2½ years and counting and then complain we are not moving fast enough. Well, if it weren't clear by now, the tactics are not going to work. The Senate is going to press on. We are going to do our job.

Today, we will press on despite 492 days of obstruction—492 days of obstruction—and confirm Peter Wright, the President's nominee to serve as—listen to this—an Assistant Administrator at EPA. He has been waiting for 492 days.

As it happens, we will also vote on two Kentuckians—Robert King and John Pallasch. Mr. King has been nominated to serve as Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education. He comes with an impressive record of experience in higher education administration and advocacy at home in the Bluegrass State and beyond. Mr. Pallasch has been tapped for Assistant Secretary of Labor. His résumé includes service as director of the Kentucky Office of Employment and Training as well as previous service with the Department as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Mine Safety and Health.

I will be proud to support each of these well-qualified nominees as their senior Senator from Kentucky but moreover as someone who believes that the American President deserves to have his team in place and that citizens ought to be governed by the government they actually voted for.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### STUDENT LOAN DEBT

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, the Democratic Party's motto this year might as well be “Free Stuff”—free