

that even thinks of interfering with the elections of 2018 and those who interfered with 2016.

Finally, I believe it is important for a full-throated apology of the White House to the intelligence community and the American people. I remind you that I do not stand here singularly by myself. I stand here standing on a constitutional democracy which is the United States of America.

Article I powers of this Congress is that we must act. We cannot correct it with a typographical correction—wouldn't over would. The reporter directly asked: Who do you believe? It was never answered that it was the American people in the intelligence community, Mr. Speaker. It was indicated that Mr. Putin gave a strong response of denial, and it was implied in that, that I believe Mr. Putin, and I am not going to answer the question to say that I believe my intelligence community. Therefore, I would indicate it is time for the Congress to act.

SECURITY CLEARANCES FOR PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from California (Mr. HUFFMAN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. HUFFMAN. Mr. Speaker, this week's stunning betrayal by President Trump, choosing Russian President Vladimir Putin over our own intelligence agencies, begs questions that we should never have to ask about an American President: What does Putin have on President Trump? Is he literally being blackmailed? Do we have a Manchurian candidate as our President?

It is difficult to imagine any other explanation for Trump's constant bowing and scraping at the feet of the Russian dictator or of his refusal to hold Putin accountable for his election interference, even after numerous indictments, including 12 Russian military officials, and even after the arrest of a Russian national who was caught trying to use the NRA as a tool to change U.S. policy toward Russia.

And it is hard to find any other explanation for Trump's constantly calling Special Counsel Mueller's investigation a "witch hunt," even after so many indictments and multiple guilty pleas.

On Monday, our security interests of this country demanded that our President speak out and seek accountability from the foreign adversary who attacked it. But instead, the American people witnessed a Manchurian moment, exposing that President Trump is so deeply compromised on Russia that he is willing to alienate our European allies, to blame our country for the strains in the relationship with Russia, and to betray our intelligence and law enforcement communities by casting doubt on their conclusions and accepting Putin's self-serving denials.

And so the world wonders: What does Putin have over Trump? Now, it could

be some compromising or embarrassing financial information, which would explain Trump's refusal to release his tax returns.

Now, let's remember, candidate Donald Trump promised, if elected, promised unequivocally that he would publicly release his tax returns just like every other modern President. We are still waiting. But Trump's position has evolved to an outright refusal, making him the only President in modern history to refuse to share this information with the American people.

Now, it could also be his nefarious dealings with Russia that Trump wants to keep secret. Now, we know Trump and his family and his campaign had a web of contacts with Russia going back several years. The degree of collusion in the 2016 election is still unknown, but we know that, at the very least, they explored receiving illegal foreign election assistance, and we know that assistance was actually provided by Russia.

Or it could be more straightforward blackmail. We know about the reports that Russia had compromising information on Trump that includes not just financial entanglements, but a sex tape.

Now, I am confident that whatever President Trump is hiding, Special Counsel Mueller's investigation will get to the bottom of it. And that is why I have joined my colleagues here on the floor to demand that the Mueller investigation be protected from political interference and that we let the special counsel's office do its job.

But we should also think about how we got into this surreal situation in the first place. How did a Presidential candidate with such potentially disqualifying baggage slide through the process without a way for voters to know about it? There is a clear public interest in ensuring that Presidential candidates are not deeply compromised or vulnerable to blackmail.

And that is why today I introduce the Protecting Access to Classified Information in Elections Act. It is a new bill designed to protect the national security of our country by allowing Presidential candidates to voluntarily undergo a national security clearance investigation well before the election. Candidates who are granted a security clearance would have the option of publicly disclosing that fact on a website maintained by the director of national intelligence.

Current law doesn't work that way. Presidential candidates start getting classified briefings before they take office, but it is based on an informal grant of access by the sitting President, and voters may assume that candidates have security clearances, but they don't actually have to get one and not all of them do.

By providing an early security clearance process, candidates can provide a real assurance to the American people that there is nothing in their back-

ground, such as financial or personal vulnerabilities, that should prevent them from receiving our Nation's top secret information. And if a candidate chooses not to seek that security clearance, voters can consider that fact, too, when they cast their vote.

An early security clearance would also virtually rule out the possibility that a Presidential candidate is vulnerable to foreign coercion, compromise, or manipulation, because among the things scrutinized by background investigators are tax returns and financial dealings. Investigators would learn if an applicant has been accused of sexual misconduct.

So, Mr. Speaker, I ask my colleagues to support to this bill.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Members are reminded to refrain from engaging in personalities toward the President of the United States.

A CALL TO ACTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from New Hampshire (Ms. SHEA-PORTER) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SHEA-PORTER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call this body to action. Two days ago, we watched, the world watched in horror in Finland as our President took Putin's side instead of our intelligence community's side. Our intelligence community told us, told him that Russia attacked our democracy and attacked our elections. For whatever reason, President Trump seems unable to clearly state that he agrees with intelligence.

Just yesterday, when he said he misspoke, he then shifted and went back to it could be others. Why? We have to ask ourselves why. The Republican majority has been determined to do absolutely nothing in response when it is clear that there is much that we can and must do. Why?

They have declined to pass additional legislation to serve as a deterrent to Russia and that would sanction Russia if they attacked our elections again. Why? Especially when we have been warned that Russia intends to interfere with our elections in just a few months.

They have this whole Congress, but still Republicans have not passed any legislation to strengthen our election security system to mitigate this threat. Instead, congressional Republicans are trying to cut—this is unbelievable—trying to cut election security grants by hundreds of millions of dollars. Why? Don't they at least want to protect us going into the future?

They have blocked votes to force the President to release his tax returns so we can know whether his business deals are affecting his decisions in the office of the Presidency. Why?

And, most importantly, they have consistently refused to vote to protect Special Counsel Mueller's investigation. Why?

Speaker RYAN controls the floor. Republicans are the ones who put all of

the legislation on the floor. They could do this now, but they refuse to, even though they have the power. Why won't they? Why won't they let us investigate? Why won't they let us have a vote?

America and the world is watching. They are wondering how long it will take for this Republican Congress to act. When will it be too much?

We have heard some Republican heroes like JOHN MCCAIN and others who have said this was the most horrific performance and that we must—must talk about this, and yet we don't. Why?

TIME TO REFLECT ON WHAT IT MEANS TO BE PATRIOTIC

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. LEWIS) for 5 minutes.

Mr. LEWIS of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I come to the House floor because today is the birthday of my friend, my partner in the fight for justice and equality, Nelson Mandela.

During the height of the civil rights movement and the early days of the labor movement, you had to make a decision: Which side are you on?

So, Mr. Speaker, on this day, of all days, I cannot, I will not stay silent when our Nation, our democracy, and the American people are under attack. We fought too hard and too long to stand on the sidelines when so much is at stake.

When you see something that is not right, that is not just, you have to find a way to get in the way. You have to get in good trouble—necessary trouble.

Now is the time to wake up. It is time to be brave, bold, and courageous. During the American Revolution, people suffered and died for the dream of democracy, for the sacred right to vote, and for the ability to choose their representatives. Hundreds and thousands of men and women lost their lives to preserve our union and to defend our values.

What I saw on Monday was a shame, an embarrassment, and a disgrace to their legacy, their memory, and what they sacrificed. During times like these, I encourage every person to take some time and have what I call an executive session with themselves and their very souls. Because today, Mr. Speaker, each of us faces the question of what it means to be patriotic.

Ask yourself, do you stand with the American people or do you stand with a dictator? Do you stand with democracy or do you stand with a czar? Do you stand with friends and allies or do you stand with someone who approves violent attacks on the media, human rights advocates, and struggling democracies?

Mr. Speaker, the American House is on fire, it is burning, and if we are not mindful, if we are not watchful, this fire will consume us all.

The United States Constitution began with the words: "We, the People." You see, the Founding Fathers'

very first priority, the very first article was to outline the role and the responsibilities of the United States Congress in our system of checks and balances.

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The people who elected us are sounding the alarms. Never before has our constitutional mandate been more important. Never before have the pillars of our democracy been under attack.

Mr. Speaker, each and every one of us swore an oath of office. Whether Democrat or Republican, we all have an equal mission, an obligation, and a mandate to uphold this promise.

Mr. Speaker, the time has come, and the question is simple: Will you show up for duty?

Congress must speak up, we must speak out, and, Mr. Speaker, we must act. If we fail to do so, history and the American voters will not be kind.

The threat is occurring in realtime on our watch, and the ball is in our court. The clock is ticking, and there is no time to waste.

PRESIDENT TRUMP AND RUSSIA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Maryland (Mr. BROWN) for 5 minutes.

Mr. BROWN of Maryland. Mr. Speaker, President Trump had a straightforward mission in Europe last week: stand with our NATO allies and stand up to Russia's Putin. Instead, President Trump squandered U.S. influence and abdicated our leadership by abusing and dividing our allies and fawning over a tyrant who actively seeks to undermine our democracy.

While Putin may not be dictating American policy, President Trump is seemingly pushing forward his agenda. Putin wants to restore Russia as a great global power at the expense of the United States. He wants to expand Russian influence over Europe by weakening NATO and the European Union. In Putin's mind, when the United States and Europe flounder, Russia is stronger.

If Putin was calling the shots, he would have encouraged President Trump to criticize NATO and raise doubts on whether we would defend our allies if they haven't paid their bills. He would invite President Trump to undermine the European Union, our largest trading partner and investor, by lauding Brexit, denouncing trade, supporting antidemocratic populists, and undermining Germany and Chancellor Merkel. And that is exactly what happened.

Rather than projecting unity, President Trump's participation at the NATO summit generated nonstop images of division. Substantive issues received little or no attention.

Putin is the biggest winner from any disunity in NATO. During the Cold War, American and NATO troops held the line in Europe, containing and defeating the Soviet Union.

I served in Germany for 5 years at that time and witnessed firsthand how we won the Cold War. But we didn't do it through military power alone. We won because NATO military strength helped create the space for democratic dissidents in Eastern Europe to come together and bring down Soviet rule from within. This was the success of America's strategy—pursued by Presidents from Roosevelt to Kennedy, to Reagan—of advancing American values.

For seven decades, the NATO alliance has ensured that America's strength and influence are magnified around the globe. Our alliance has extended the promise of peace, security, and prosperity to much of the democratic world, and it has maintained the inviolable promise of collective defense.

America needed its allies after we were attacked on 9/11, and our allies came through. They fought and died with us.

And threats to our collective security have not vanished in the 21st century. These shared security challenges should have been at the top of President Trump's agenda, but they weren't.

Since Putin's annexation of Crimea, NATO has found renewed purpose and effectiveness, stepping up exercises and establishing the enhanced forward presence in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.

Additional measures may be necessary to continue to confront Russian aggression. This includes Secretary Mattis' 30-30 plan to establish the readiness of 30 land battalions, 30 air fighter squadrons, and 30 ships ready to deploy within 30 days of being put on alert; Poland's proposal to bring more U.S. troops to the country and setting up a joint armored division with 15,000 American troops, and as many as 250 tanks and armored vehicles; and completion of the European missile shield by 2020. None of this was discussed.

Contrary to President Trump's declarations, NATO members have been increasing defense spending since 2014: almost \$46 billion, the biggest buildup by U.S. allies in 25 years.

NATO is also expanding its training mission in Afghanistan and launching a new one in Iraq, showcasing NATO's ongoing commitment to the fight against terrorism. Yet President Trump chose to deride our most important allies.

With as much passion as President Trump questions our European allies as freeloaders, his actions suggest a desire for a cozy relationship with Putin's Russia. Russia is one of our most aggressive adversaries, working to rupture the relationship between the United States and our closest partners, weaken our influence in the Middle East, and pose an ongoing cyber threat.

Other than elevating Putin and failing to mention Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea, what good did President Trump accomplish during this summit? I have no answer as to why he, unlike any of his Republican or