

Russian intelligence officers have been indicted. These are the people who really did seek to undermine our democracy. Yet, curiously, many of our Democratic colleagues and most of the news media don't seem to care about that. New insight into defending America? Russian nationals being indicted? These don't seem to interest my colleagues across the aisle—no interest—just like there has been little interest in the steps this administration has taken to make Russia pay for its interference and strengthen America's hand.

Election interference was just one part of Russia's strategy to undercut the United States, and this administration has taken the problem head-on. We have a new, coherent national security strategy and national defense strategy that actually take the threat seriously.

We have new sanctions. We have provided Georgia and Ukraine with weapons to better defend themselves—capabilities the previous administration denied our partners—now listen to this—out of fear of provoking Russia. We have worked against pipeline projects like Nord Stream 2 that would further expand Putin's influence. We have strengthened and reformed NATO so the alliance can present a united front. We proved Russia's noncompliance with the INF and walked away from a treaty that Moscow had turned into a sham. Over Russian objections, the Trump administration has also twice enforced President Obama's redline in Syria after Assad's use of chemical weapons.

With respect to election security, Congress appropriated hundreds of millions of dollars to State governments to shore up their systems. The administration increased information sharing from the Department of Homeland Security in cooperation with the States. According to press reports, the Department of Defense has expanded its capabilities and authorities to thwart cyber threats to our democracy. No longer will we just hope Moscow respects our sovereignty—we will now defend it. These are just a few examples, and there is already evidence they are having an effect.

We just had the 2018 midterm elections. Thanks to this administration's leadership, all 50 States and more than 1,400 local election jurisdictions focused on election security like never before. The DHS provided resources to localities for better cybersecurity, and private social media companies monitored their own platforms for foreign interference. Thanks to efforts across the Federal Government in 2018, we were ready. Clearly, that is progress. The Mueller report will help us as will the upcoming report from the Select Committee on Intelligence. These threats and challenges are real. Our responsibility to strengthen America is serious, and it requires serious work.

Speaking of serious, seriousness is not what we have seen from the Democratic Party in recent days. What we

have seen is a meltdown—an absolute meltdown. We have seen an inability to accept the bottom-line conclusion on Russian interference from the special counsel's report, which read that the investigation did not establish that members of the Trump campaign conspired or coordinated with the Russian Government in its election interference activities. That was the conclusion—2 years of exhaustive investigation and nothing to establish the fanciful conspiracy theory that the Democratic politicians and TV talking heads had treated like a forgone conclusion. They told everyone there had been a conspiracy between Russia and the Trump campaign. Yet, on this central question, the special counsel's finding is clear—case closed.

This ought to be good news for everyone, but my Democratic colleagues seem to be publicly working through the five stages of grief. The first stage is denial. Remember what happened when the Attorney General released his preliminary letter that described the special counsel's bottom-line legal conclusion? Denial. Immediately, there was totally baseless speculation that perhaps Attorney General Barr had not quoted the report properly.

Then comes stage No. 2—anger. Welcome to Washington in recent days. The Democrats are angry—angry that the facts have disappointed them, angry that our legal system will not magically undo the 2016 election for them. They have opted to channel all of their partisan anger onto the Attorney General. They seem to be angrier at Bill Barr for doing his job than they are at Vladimir Putin. This is a distinguished public servant whose career stretches back almost 50 years. He is widely respected. Nobody claims he has any prior personal allegiance to this particular President.

Why are they angry? Why are they angry? Did the Attorney General fire the special counsel or force him to wind down prematurely? No. Did he sit on the Mueller report and keep it secret? No. He quickly reported out his bottom-line legal conclusions and then released as much as possible for the world to see. Did he use redactions? Did he use redactions to mislead the public? No. Working with the special counsel's team, he released as much as possible within standard—standard—safeguards. So it is hard to see the source of the anger.

Maybe our Democratic colleagues are thinking of some strange new kind of “coverup” where you take the entire thing you are supposedly covering up and post it on the internet. The claims get more and more utterly absurd. There are baseless accusations of perjury and laughable threats of impeachment.

We all know what is going on here. This is the whole angry barrage that Democrats had prepared to unleash on President Trump—except the facts let them down. The facts let them down. So the left has swung all these cannons

around and fired them at the Attorney General. It is not for any legitimate reason but just because he is a convenient target.

There is this “outrage industrial complex” that spans from Capitol press conferences to cable news. They are grieving—grieving—that the national crisis they spent 2 years wishing for did not materialize. But for the rest of the country, this is good news. It is bad news for the “outrage industrial complex” but good news for the country. So now they are slandering a distinguished public servant because the real world has disappointed them.

Instead of taking a deep breath and coming back to reality, our colleagues across the aisle want to shoot the messenger and keep the perpetual outrage machine right on going, even undermining the institution of the Attorney General itself in the process.

Remember, Russia set out to sow discord, to create chaos in American politics, and to undermine confidence in our democracy. But on that front, given the left's total fixation on delegitimizing the President Americans chose and shooting any messenger who tells them inconvenient truths, I am afraid the Russians hardly need to lift a finger—hardly need to lift a finger.

The last stage of grievance is acceptance. For the country's sake, I hope my Democratic friends get there sometime soon. There are serious issues the American people need us to tackle. There is more progress for middle-class families we need to deliver.

For 2 years, the Democratic Party held out hope that the legal system would undo their loss in 2016. They refused to make peace with the American people's choice. But the American people elected this President. They did. The American people voted for change. The American people sent us here to deliver results for their families. That is what Republicans have been doing for the past 2 years and counting. That is what Republicans will continue to do. Whenever our Democratic friends can regain their composure and come back to reality, we look forward to their help.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR—S. 1332 AND H.R. 9

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I understand there are two bills at the desk due for a second reading en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The leader is correct.

The clerk will read the titles of the bills for the second time en bloc.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (S. 1332) to set forth the congressional budget for the United States Government for fiscal year 2020 and setting forth the appropriate budgetary levels for fiscal years 2021 through 2029.

A bill (H.R. 9) to direct the President to develop a plan for the United States to meet its nationally determined contribution under the Paris Agreement, and for other purposes.

Mr. McCONNELL. In order to place the bills on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I object to further proceedings en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bills will be placed on the calendar.

Mr. McCONNELL. I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

MUELLER REPORT

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, I have just listened to my friend the majority leader engage in an astounding bit of whitewash—not unexpected but entirely unconvincing.

Yes, the Mueller investigation took 2 years, and, yes, it produced a stunning document in the end—not only a damning appraisal of our election security and just how willing a major Presidential campaign was to accept and amplify the disinformation of a foreign adversary but also a thorough examination of the behavior of a lawless President, who at least on 11 occasions, according to the report, may have obstructed a Federal investigation.

So while my friend the majority leader wants to say “case closed”—I don’t blame them—375 former Federal prosecutors looked at the Mueller report and said publicly that the conduct of the President amounts to felony obstruction of justice. In any other case, were he not President, those prosecutors would have recommended bringing charges.

Our leader saying “Let’s move on” is sort of like Richard Nixon saying “Let’s move on” at the height of the investigation of his wrongdoing. Of course he wants to move on. He wants to cover it up. He wants silence on one of the most serious issues we face—whether a foreign power can manipulate our elections, the wellspring of our democracy.

If the leader is sincere, then put election security on the floor. Let’s debate it. Put sanctions on Russia on the floor. Let’s debate it. He doesn’t want to move on; he wants to run away from these awful facts that relate to the wellspring of our democracy—foreign interference in our election and a President who is lawless. That is what he wants to push under the rug.

Of course, he would say this is all done. It is not done. If Russia interferes in 2020, it is not done. If this President or future Presidents believe

that they can avoid the law and even break the law—at least according to 375 prosecutors—it is not done. This is very serious stuff.

The leader bemoans “breathless conspiracy theorizing.” For a moment, I thought he was referring to the President and to those House and Senate Republicans who for 2 years intentionally sought to undercut Mueller’s investigation by peddling farfetched conspiracy theories about deep state “coups,” unmasking scandals, and uranium purchases to muddy the waters. I guess he meant something about Democrats. But I don’t remember the Republican leader bemoaning those breathless conspiracies; nor do I remember the Republican leader or the Republican Senators having such a distaste for congressional oversight during the Obama administration. On things far less serious, they were relentless in wanting investigations. Now they say “never mind” when the wellspring of our democracy is at stake, there is foreign interference in our elections, and a President who just disobeys the law. The leader sure acted differently a few years back.

What I remember is that from the very beginning, the Republican leader has not taken the threat of Russia’s election interference as seriously as he should. In the run-up to the 2016 election, when the Obama administration sought to warn State election officials about foreign meddling and designate election systems as “critical infrastructure,” Leader McCONNELL reportedly delayed for weeks, “watered down” the letter from congressional leaders, and pushed back against the designation. Yes, I would have swept this under the rug if I had done that. I wouldn’t want to keep talking about it.

Despite 2 years in charge of the Senate since the 2016 election, Leader McCONNELL has pursued additional election security only after being prodded by Democrats, and it has been half-baked at that.

Leader McCONNELL thwarted the Rules Committee from marking up the bipartisan legislation designed to enhance election security.

At the beginning of the year, 42 Republicans, including Leader McCONNELL, essentially voted in favor of the administration’s proposal to weaken sanctions against Russia.

In the last round of negotiations, Senate Republicans blocked our attempt to fund additional efforts to make our election safe in 2020.

Now, despite a preponderance of testimony from our intelligence officials—not politicians; intelligence officials who are in charge of our security and well-being—they testified that foreign powers are ramping up to interfere in our next election. The Senate has done nothing to grapple with the problem, even as minimal of a request as I made to the leader: an all-Senators’ classified briefing from our defense and intelligence leaders so that the Senate understands what we need to do to pro-

tect American in 2020 and beyond. I have been asking for 2 weeks, and we still haven’t gotten action.

Let’s bring the bipartisan Secure Elections Act to the floor and debate and amend. Let’s strengthen sanctions against Putin and any other adversary who would dare to interfere with the sanctity of our elections.

Regardless of what you believe about the President’s conduct, we should all—every single Democrat and every single Republican—be working to ensure that what happened in 2016 never happens again. We can debate how much of an effect it had, but we sure don’t want it to be worse—whatever it was—in 2020 than it was in 2016. And the leader sits on his hands, does nothing, creates a legislative graveyard for these and every other issue, and then says: Let’s move on. No way. No way. We can do both. We can make our elections more secure. We can examine what happened so we can make them more secure and do other issues. So far, Leader McCONNELL is doing neither.

What we have here is very simple. What we have here is a concerted effort to circle the wagons to protect the President from accountability, to whitewash his reprehensible conduct by simply declaring it irrelevant. In that effort, the leader and Senate Republicans are falling down drastically on their constitutional duty to provide oversight and, I fear, to defend the national interest as well.

SENATE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, let me now talk about something related—the legislative graveyard.

Leader McCONNELL says: Let’s move on and work together. There hasn’t been a single bill put on the floor on issues we can debate, whether it is protecting preexisting conditions, making our education system better, dealing with the problem of the high cost of drugs, doing infrastructure—nothing. Just appointments have been put on the floor. And nothing has been done on election security at the very minimum.

I know the leader is afraid to debate what happened and explore what happened given the tawdry history of certainly President Trump and of Senate Republicans in responding to this serious issue, but at least he could move forward and we could put some bills on the floor and debate them to strengthen our election security, which everyone admits is weak.

So if Leader McCONNELL, as he says, is ready to move on to serious things, then how about bringing forward legislation to protect our elections? For 4 months, the Senate has been little more than a legislative graveyard, and election security is exhibit A.

The House passed important reforms to improve and safeguard our elections. No action here in the Senate. We have a bipartisan election security bill waiting in committee. No movement from the leader.