

head to the polls to cast their ballots in an election that, by necessity, will be conducted in a much different fashion than in nearly any election in our Nation's history. Because of COVID-19, there will likely be a historic increase in mail-in ballots.

Mail-in voting is a process that is well established in our country. Several States have conducted elections this way for years without any issue at all. Because of COVID-19, there may also be some delays in determining the results of the election while every ballot is counted. This, too, has happened before, but there is no doubt that this election will be unique, and it means that leaders from both sides of the aisle should be joining together now to ensure the integrity of the election and the public's confidence in the result.

Sadly, there are some who are systematically undermining public confidence in the voting process and irresponsibly fanning suspicions and conspiracy theories about the legitimacy of election results. At the top of the list here is, unfortunately, once again, the President of the United States, who has exploited and capitalized on fears about holding an election in the middle of COVID-19 to attack mail-in voting and to advance comically false claims of widespread voter fraud. The President has done both of those. He has attacked mail-in voting and made these false claims of fraud.

We are talking about the integrity of our elections here. This is the wellspring of our democracy. It is fundamental for our country, something that American soldiers have fought and died for—and the President trifles with it, and, of course, our Senate Republican colleagues go along.

So, today, we are doing two things in this regard because we have a responsibility to do everything we can to see that this election does not mark the beginning of a new age when our election results are doubted, conspiracy theories flourish, and our grand democracy is tarnished around the world. If we allow this kind of malicious tampering with the wellspring of our democracy in terms of people's trust in it, it is the beginning of the end.

Donald Trump doesn't care. We know he only cares about himself. The Senate Republicans don't say a peep. We know they are afraid of Donald Trump. Even when they disagree with him, they remain quiet, and too often they agree with him.

We cannot allow our people to lose faith in elections, and we must do everything to ensure that they are conducted in a fair way that the American people will accept, despite COVID and all the problems it creates.

So, this morning, Senator SANDERS and I have written a letter to the Republican leader asking him to work with us to establish a special bipartisan committee with equal representation from both parties to guarantee the integrity of our election process.

The committee should focus on three issues: one, confirm the security of and

confidence in our mail-in systems, our vote-by-mail systems; two, measures to ensure that every vote is counted; and three, discuss and prepare for possible postelection scenarios.

The function of the committee would be to hold hearings about what is being done around the country to make certain that our public institutions are prepared to conduct a smooth and reliable election, free from voter suppression and intimidation, that every vote will be counted and there will be confidence in the outcome.

Senator SANDERS and I and many in our caucus—including Senator KLOBUCHAR, whom I will mention in a minute—feel very, very strongly that we have to do something, and this bipartisan committee can ensure the American people that the Senate is on top of this.

We hope the Republican leader will accept our request. We hope he will not run away from his responsibility to ensure there are fair elections. We hope that he will not go along with Donald Trump's dangerous rhetoric about the fairness of our elections.

Later today, the Senator from Minnesota and ranking member of the Rules Committee, Senator KLOBUCHAR, and I will be speaking with a bipartisan group of secretaries of state. We will be getting a briefing on the state of our election preparedness around the country. I expect they will reiterate their call for another major priority being blocked by Senate Republicans: election assistance funding.

I am hopeful we can still find agreement on a bipartisan basis to help our States with critical funding to prepare for this historic election. This issue is above partisan politics. It is the essence of our democracy. It is disgraceful that Republicans are playing games with this—perhaps for electoral advantage, perhaps for fear of President Trump—but we will not let it happen.

We, as a caucus, repeat to the American people: The best way to prevent an election from being manipulated or stolen is to vote. The more people who vote and the earlier they vote, when they can vote early, the better off our democracy will be.

RUSSIA

Madam President, now, on Russian disinformation, another matter, the chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs continues to further his probe into the family of the former Vice President and plans to release a report next week that appears designed to influence the upcoming Presidential election.

While the rest of the country has been focused on fighting the global pandemic, for the last few months, the chairman and Republicans of the committee have wasted taxpayer resources to run a hit job on President Trump's political rival. Even worse, it seems that several lines of investigation have echoed materials pushed by the Kremlin.

In fact, some of the allegations that the Homeland Security chairman pursues are the same ones propagated by Andriy Derkach, a known Russian agent who was recently sanctioned by President Trump's own Department of the Treasury for interfering in our election. So here President Trump's Department of the Treasury sanctions Derkach, and the chairman of the committee repeats the same kind of discredited allegations that Derkach propagates. It is outrageous. It is a disgrace.

The hearings and subpoenas that have come out of the Homeland Security Committee are also a disgrace by any standard. The more we learn about Russian agents like Mr. Derkach, the more it looks like the Kremlin is trying to launder anti-American information through the U.S. Senate, and because Moscow prefers to support Donald Trump, as it did in the last election, it seems that some of this disinformation finds a sympathetic audience among Republican Senators.

So today, alongside Senators WYDEN, PETERS, REED, and FEINSTEIN, I will be introducing a resolution calling for a cessation of any Senate investigation or activity that allows Congress to act as a conduit for Russian information. There should not be a single aspect of this Chamber that, wittingly or unwittingly, furthers the propaganda machine of Vladimir Putin's intelligence services.

I will have more to say on this matter later, but for one of the most important committees to be echoing a Kremlin-backed conspiracy theory is beyond the pale. As we are about to hold a national election, it must stop immediately.

VENEZUELA

Madam President, finally, later today my friends Senators DURBIN, MENENDEZ, and VAN HOLLEN will come to the floor to try again to secure temporary protected status for Venezuelans seeking refuge here in the United States. There are roughly 200,000 eligible Venezuelans in the United States who are now at risk of being sent back to a failed and dangerous nation, rife with political repression and human suffering—a nation that, under Maduro's regime, constitutes the single biggest humanitarian crisis in our hemisphere today.

Despite having all the authority that he needs to solve this problem on his own, President Trump will not grant temporary protected status, and his enablers in the Senate have repeatedly blocked passage of House legislation that would provide it. So we are going to try once again to get this passed.

Democrats stand with the people of Venezuela. Later today, my Republican colleagues will need to decide if they want to restore the moral leadership of the United States and support the protection of Venezuelans fleeing violence and despair or leave them all in limbo, facing deportation to a humanitarian disaster.