

Now, for the last 4 years, thanks to the actions of this Senate and the leadership of the current administration, a huge number of dedicated experts have worked hard to improve our defenses and regain America's trust.

In 2016, the Department of Homeland Security was on an island, but under this administration, DHS officials have built partnerships with State and local officials who run our elections and stood up massive intelligence-sharing efforts that connect them with Federal authorities, the intelligence community, as well as the private sector.

In 2016, the outgoing administration hid their limited grasp of the threat from Congress and the American people. The Trump administration and intelligence experts have been far, far more transparent.

In 2016, only 14 State or local authorities had high-tech sensors to detect cyberattacks. Now all 50 States—all of them—have them. The Trump administration has imposed real pain on Russia: closing consulates, expelling spies, sanctioning oligarchs and agents of influence, and equipping neighbors that are threatened by Moscow to deter further aggression.

Here in the Senate, multiple committees have become major players in this effort. Our colleagues on the Intelligence Committee spent, literally, years producing their 5-part, 1,300-plus-page report on what happened back in 2016. Some of their bipartisan recommendations are already taking effect.

And then there is funding. The Senate has led the efforts to set aside more than \$1 billion in extra election assistance, from foreign interference to COVID-19. Through the end of the primaries, more than 70 percent of the huge sum we provided in the CARES Act is still unspent. As recently as a few months ago, more than 60 percent of the first tranche we provided all the way back in fiscal 2018 was still unspent. So we have made sure money is not an obstacle.

So these threats are still with us, and they have evolved. Not only Russia but also China, Iran, and other adversaries are looking constantly for ways to interfere in our politics, divide Americans, and erode confidence in our institutions. That is a fact.

The work goes on, but we certainly aren't flat-footed any longer. This progress should be cause for bipartisan celebration, but one side of the aisle seems to prefer pretending—pretending—there hasn't been any progress at all.

Frankly, while nonpartisan experts worked around the clock to fight our adversaries' destabilizing efforts, too many Democrats have been undermining America's confidence in our democracy to the degree that those adversaries could only dream of: baseless accusations that the last election was stolen; casual assertions that this one, too, must be illegitimate if they don't win.

On a monthly basis, we have heard new, hysterical pronouncements that our democracy was on death's door. Even sensitive intelligence became grist for the partisan mill.

This has not been universal. There has been good bipartisan work in some committees, but the Democratic leadership appeared to make a conscious choice: Instead of treating election security like the unifying, bipartisan issue it ought to be, they would use it as a partisan cudgel to hit the other side, playing right into our adversaries' hands.

This week, the Democratic leader attacked Republicans and basically questioned our patriotism because we did not rush to meet his latest demands for empty theatrics. He proposes to crowd out 4 years of bipartisan work from actual committees by inventing a brandnew Senate committee and pull experts off the frontlines during the home stretch for theatrical hearings here on Capitol Hill.

He says we must allocate more money. Never mind that the millions and millions of dollars we have already set aside remain unspent. He proposes that the administration pull experts off the frontlines to continue briefing him. Never mind that ODNI alone has supported 53 election security briefings to Congress since 2018—53 election security briefings to Congress since 2018. I am sure 54 will be the magic number that finally makes our colleague a reasonable voice on this issue.

The truth is, briefings are ongoing; the Intelligence and Armed Services Committees will be briefed this week; and all Senators will have access to written intelligence analysis by career professionals if new developments arise since last month's all-Senate briefings.

The Democratic leader's demands aren't solutions. These aren't what the experts say we need; they are just empty gestures concocted so the Democratic leader can complain that Republicans hate democracy and apple pie when we don't go along with them.

So remember, fear and division, reduced confidence in our democracy, Americans divided against ourselves: that is exactly what Russia wants—exactly. That is what China wants too. That is just what our adversaries want to achieve, and it is exactly what the Democratic leader helps them achieve when he turns a bipartisan national issue that should unite us into one more pretext for partisan finger-pointing.

Our colleague from New York said recently that "Republicans are the enemy of the good." No, Republicans and Democrats are not enemies. No fellow Americans are enemies.

Our people, our democracy, have real enemies in some corners of the world. I expect they are absolutely thrilled to hear our own politicians talking that way.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME
The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Morning business is closed.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session to resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Franklin Ulyses Valderrama, of Illinois, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

HOT SPRINGS VA FACILITY

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, South Dakota's veterans and the Hot Springs community are currently celebrating the VA's announcement that it has begun the process of rescinding its order to close the Hot Springs VA facility. This was a hard-fought victory in a battle that we weren't always sure we would win. It started almost a decade ago, in 2011, when the Obama administration announced its plans to realign—when I say "realign," reclose—the Hot Springs VA facility.

I was well aware of what the Hot Springs facility means to South Dakota veterans and to the entire Hot Springs community, and I determined that there wasn't going to be a closure if I could help it. I knew that closing the Hot Springs facility would put accessible care out of the reach of a lot of rural and Tribal veterans—not only rural and Tribal South Dakota veterans but rural and Tribal veterans from neighboring Wyoming and Nebraska who depend on the Hot Springs facility for care.

Traveling to Rapid City and Fort Meade for care, as the VA proposed, would be a real hardship, if not an impossibility, for many of these veterans. I also strongly disagreed with moving not only medical care but the vital Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Program from Hot Springs. Not only would this put the program out of reach of some veterans, I believed it was also a mistake to remove a tremendously effective program from the place where it has been so successful and try to reconstitute it elsewhere.

I got to work in Congress, along with other Members of the South Dakota delegation. My first priority was simply trying to get Hot Springs' veterans a hearing with the VA.

In 2016, after years of trying, we persuaded then-VA Secretary Bob McDonald to visit Hot Springs. Unfortunately, the visit didn't work, and soon