

United States Senate  
MAJORITY LEADER

September 17, 2020

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Senate Minority Leader  
The Capitol, S-221  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Leader Schumer:

Thank you for your multiple letters dated September 15th concerning the upcoming elections. While your inflammatory floor speeches and counterproductive demands suggest that real bipartisan discussion was not your aim, I wanted to respond with the seriousness and factual accuracy that our nation deserves on this crucial subject.

Americans must have confidence their state and local authorities are doing everything possible to conduct safe, fair, and secure elections. That's why Congress, the Trump administration, the Intelligence Community, and the private sector have spent four years working together to help election authorities prepare for this year's general election.

Serious threats remain, as I will discuss in a moment. But as you have heard countless times in the many briefings you and I have received from nonpartisan experts, and as the Democratic Vice Chairman of the Intelligence Committee has publicly affirmed many times, our nation is far better prepared now than the Obama-Biden administration had us prepared for 2016.

The list of improvements is massive, from high-tech cyber sensors to streamlined bureaucracies. Today, the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security, the Intelligence Community, all 50 states, thousands of local authorities, and private-sector partners such as social media companies collaborate intensely on a daily basis. These coordinated defenses were nonexistent in 2016.

The Senate and the Trump administration have imposed painful costs on Russia for its election interference and other misdeeds. The U.S. has shuttered Russian consulates, sanctioned oligarchs and agents of influence, and sent weapons to Ukraine and Georgia that the prior administration declined to send.

The Trump administration has also directly involved the Department of Defense in election security. General Nakasone of U.S. Cyber Command has briefed Congress and written publicly about Cyber Command's posture shift and new involvement in election security, and how it has already paid off: *"Thanks to these and other efforts, the United States disrupted a concerted effort to undermine the [2018] midterm elections. Together with its partners, Cyber Command is doing all of this and more for the 2020 elections."*

In sum, on President Obama's watch, as Vice Chairman Warner put it, "*we were caught flat-footed.*" Nobody thinks the threats are behind us, but America is not flat-footed anymore.

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As you know, the Senate has led at every stage.

Our colleagues on the Intelligence Committee spent years studying what led up to 2016. They conducted roughly 200 interviews, received dozens of briefings, and produced a five-part, 1,300-plus-page bipartisan report. Federal and local officials have already taken some of their recommendations.

The Homeland Security and Government Affairs Committee has held numerous hearings and member and staff briefings on election security. Our colleagues on the Rules Committee and their staff are in constant contact with officials and stakeholders at every level and have held major hearings themselves.

Then there is the matter of funding.

Since 2016, Congress has set aside more than \$1 billion to shore up elections. The latest data suggest that we have approved this funding faster than the authorities on the ground can even spend it. This March alone, we set aside \$400 million more for elections, specifically to cope with the pandemic. Through the end of the primaries, less than 30% had been spent. As recently as a few months ago, less than 40% of the first major tranche that we set aside for election security back in FY2018 had been spent. The Senate has provided historic sums of money for this important purpose and significant portions of it are still unspent.

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This significant progress should not be ignored for political purposes. It should be acknowledged and applauded by everyone.

However, we must not have any false sense of invulnerability. As the country learned in 2000, and this year's Democratic Iowa caucuses reminded us, elections can prove confusing, messy, and litigious even absent foreign interference. And you and I both know that Russia, China, Iran, and other foreign actors continue to work actively to divide Americans and distort our politics.

Every citizen, and leaders especially, should take care to be educated consumers of information. Americans must remain clear-eyed and vigilant. But we should also remain calm, confident in our institutions, and cognizant that we are in this together.

When our adversaries meddle in American politics, their main goal is to divide us and erode trust in our government. As Russia expert Dr. Fiona Hill explained to Congress, they want to "*divide us against each other, degrade our institutions, and destroy the faith of the American people in our democracy.*" Dr. Hill also explained that "*when we are consumed by partisan rancor, we cannot combat these external forces*" as we ought.

Leading Democrats and prominent media voices have spent years downplaying our progress on election security, casting doubt on the legitimacy of elections that Democrats do not win, and abusing this crucial issue as a platform for partisan finger-pointing. First, there were years of untrue assertions that President Trump had colluded with Russia. Most recently, it was a brief meltdown over the President supposedly sabotaging the mail. Prominent Democrats now frequently and casually state that a President Trump re-election would be illegitimate.

This endless parade of partisan hysterias has furthered our adversaries' goals to a degree that Putin, Xi, and the mullahs in Tehran could scarcely have dreamt of achieving themselves.

Even the most sensitive matters have become grist for the mill of cheap partisanship. We have seen some Democrats cherry-pick which Intelligence Community assessments to trumpet and which to ignore entirely. We have seen career nonpartisan experts like the chief counterintelligence official Bill Evanina unfairly attacked when the facts defy one side's political narrative.

Now, this week, you and some of your colleagues have issued more new demands that amount to empty partisan theater at best, and at worst, could actively hurt our elections.

Fewer than 50 days before the election, you and Senator Sanders say you want a brand-new Senate committee to form and start studying election issues. You want this new committee to pull key officials and experts off the front lines during the home stretch to come to Capitol Hill for theatrical hearings. As I explained, real Senate committees with actual jurisdiction have already been at this for four years.

In another letter, you request that the experts leave the front lines for yet more closed-door Senate briefings. I believe that would make the 53rd or 54th congressional briefing on this issue that ODNI alone has supported since 2018, not counting briefings from DHS and DOD. The Intelligence Community will brief the Intelligence Committee in person before the election and will provide written updates as needed to all Senators. The Armed Services Committee will be briefed by the Department of Defense and Cyber Command on their work to secure our elections. None of our committees of jurisdiction will lack the information they need.

Finally, I understand some Democrats may try to make a political show of demanding even more election money in order to fund the government, despite the reality that significant portions of the billion-plus dollars we have already set aside remain unspent and new money might not even arrive before Election Day.

These proposals are not solutions. They are not what the experts say we need. They are theatrical gestures that were only dreamt up so Democrats could criticize Republicans for dismissing them.

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There are less than two months before the election. There is still time for Democratic leaders to stop sowing the kinds of division and fear that Putin and Xi desire and join in the good bipartisan work that has been underway for four years to protect all Americans from our common enemies.

Leader Schumer, you recently stated that "*Republicans are the enemy of the good.*" There is still time for you to remember that Democrats and Republicans are not enemies. Our fellow Americans are not our enemies. There are many around the world who wish our nation real harm. None of them work in the United States Senate.

Our adversaries want the United States of America to enter November scared, angry, divided, and lacking confidence in our institutions. They will be downright thrilled if some of our own politicians continue to help make that happen.

The security of our democracy is not a partisan issue. It should be a unifying issue.

Our nation needs you to treat it like one.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Mitch McConnell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

MITCH McCONNELL  
Senate Majority Leader