

money laundering, conspiracy to commit fraud, and conspiracy against the United States.

The fact that the activity in question took place partially before the Trump campaign offered Mr. Manafort the role of chairman in no way diminishes the gravity of the situation. If anything, it suggests that the Trump campaign was negligent in hiring as its chairman a man who was an unregistered foreign agent working for a pro-Russian proxy party in Ukraine. That man is now alleged to have been laundering large sums of money and concealing his identity as a foreign agent from the FBI and the Department of Justice, including during his time during the Trump campaign. Imagine having such poor vetting and poor judgment to hire such a person as your campaign manager.

We also learned that a Trump campaign adviser met with a Kremlin contact to discuss “dirt” they possessed on Secretary Clinton and had several email exchanges with other Trump officials about his outreach to the Russians. This disclosure should put an end to the idea that there was no communication or possible connection between the Trump campaign and Russia.

It is not fake news, Mr. President. It is not fake news. There was a connection between the Trump campaign and Russia. Who was involved, how much, and what happened are yet to be determined, but there was a connection, even though the President has denied that connection for months.

The President can assert whatever he wants on Twitter, but the facts are the facts. There were official members of the Trump campaign who were receptive to working with a hostile foreign power to obtain damaging information about their political opponent. These revelations should concern every Member of this body—Democrat, Republican, Independent, liberal, moderate, and conservative.

I understand the strength of the centrifugal forces in our politics that warp everything into a partisan battle between two sides. There are two sides to every argument, but no one is above the law, no matter what side of the argument one is on. The rule of law and American democracy are indisputable as our bedrock. We cannot abandon it for political expediency.

Special Counsel Mueller, who served both Republican and Democratic administrations—a lifetime public servant and a man of unimpeachable integrity—was appointed by President Trump’s Deputy Attorney General. Mr. Mueller was a career prosecutor and is as straight of a shooter as they come. He must be allowed to finish the work he started without any interference. If he had nothing to fear, as he claims, President Trump would encourage Special Counsel Mueller to follow every lead and pledge his full cooperation. Instead, President Trump is again trying to divert our attention by making spurious allegations and trying to knock down anyone or anything in his way,

playing right into the partisan, two-sides instinct of Washington. But this goes beyond partisanship. It goes right to the rule of law.

The President has a tendency to call anyone who disagrees with him and anyone who has facts that he doesn’t like a liar, dishonest, and this, that, or the other thing. This has demeaned and degraded our Presidency and even our country. There are places where it must stop, and it should stop at the rule of law. I say that to President Trump, who may never listen, but I say that to my Republican colleagues here in this Chamber.

The Founders of the Republic put at the center of our civic life no religion, dogma, or sovereign, but rather the rule of law. It is what separated the American experiment from the hereditary monarchies of the era and outdated ideas like the divine rights of Kings.

The rule of law holds in check our people, including our President. Donald Trump is President, not King. He cannot decree things to go away or say that facts are not facts. He is as subject as anyone else to the rule of law. That is what makes our democracy so grand. No one—no one—is below the rule of law’s protection, and no one is above its reproach, including the President of the United States. It safeguards our democracy from the usurpations of demagogues and would-be dictators. It is why this noble experiment—the American experiment—continues, and Donald Trump is shaking the foundation of that when he tries to get out from Special Counsel Mueller’s due process.

What Special Counsel Mueller represents is the rule of law at work in 21st century American democracy. Intentionally and spuriously impugning his integrity or smearing his efforts as partisan is not only inaccurate, it is not only false, it is not only fake, but it is damaging to a core ideal in our country, the independent and impartial rule of law that no man—even the President of the United States, even Donald Trump, think what he may—is above the rule of law.

Special Counsel Mueller’s investigation must be allowed to proceed unimpeded, and my friends on the other side of the aisle must help dispel the notion that his investigation is in any way partisan. To their great credit, many of my colleagues have done just that in the last 24 hours, and I salute them.

The American people must have faith that when the very foundations of our democracy are shaken by a hostile foreign power, our independent judicial system built on the rule of law will not be degraded by partisan politics. We must loudly reject forces and actors that will try to make it so—on both ends of Pennsylvania Avenue. Our leaders—our Republican leaders in the House and Senate—have an obligation to tell Donald Trump to lay off Mueller’s investigation. Let it proceed

where it goes. That is what our democracy is all about, and that is what leadership is all about.

REPUBLICAN TAX PLAN

Mr. President, according to their timeline, House Republicans are set to release the details of their tax plan tomorrow. We will see if they can do it and, if so, just how detailed it will be. What everyone in America should focus on is the question of who exactly the Republican plan will benefit. Will it be the poor, the working class, or the middle class, or will it be big corporations and the richest 1 percent?

We live in a time of immense inequality, so much so that it strains the bonds of affection that bind us together in this country. The wealthy have amassed astonishing wealth—and God bless them. We don’t begrudge them for their success, but working Americans and middle-class Americans have slipped further and further behind. The President is surely aware of this. He rode into the White House by channeling the legitimate anger and anxiety of working-class Americans who have seen their wages diminished and their jobs shipped overseas.

Will President Trump and his Republican Party, once in power, turn around and rewrite the Tax Code to benefit the wealthy few at the expense of the middle class? Will he do a 180-degree turn from what he campaigned on and what he talks about and pass a plan for the hard right—those wealthy thousand people who give so much money to the Republican Party and think tanks? Will he bow to them against everything he campaigned on and what he says? It sure seems so.

On Wednesday, Republicans will likely propose to eliminate or substantially reduce the State and local tax deductibility, a bedrock middle-class deduction claimed by over one-third of all taxpayers—not just the wealthy—most of whom are in the middle class or the upper middle class. The proposal caused such angst in the House that it almost brought down the budget resolution. So Republicans have crafted a compromise that would allow taxpayers to claim State and local deductions on property taxes but not sales and income tax. That compromise would still cost taxpayers \$900 billion.

Taxpayers in high sales tax States, like Tennessee, Florida, and Nevada, would get whacked, as would taxpayers in high income tax States, like New York, New Jersey, California, Minnesota, and Colorado. Go figure that high property tax States, like Texas, Chairman BRADY’s State, would be better off under the proposal.

Picking winners and losers like this doesn’t solve the problem. The new State and local compromise is still a nearly \$1 trillion tax hike on the middle class to pay for tax giveaways to big corporations and the very wealthy.

I say to my Republican colleagues in the House, particularly to those from suburban and fairly affluent districts, middle-class and upper middle class

districts, that they vote for this compromise at the same peril as they voted for the bill that would totally eliminate State and local deductibility. The damage still remains, and don't think a small compromise—a small haircut—can let you escape from the political whirlwind you would reap if you vote for this bill.

The Republicans are also likely to unveil tomorrow what they plan to do with 401(k)s. We have heard reports that Republicans want to tax 401(k)s to get more revenue to pay for their tax giveaways to the rich. It is another clear example that this plan is not going to be for the middle class. The 401(k)s are one of the best tools we have to encourage Americans to start saving early for retirement. We know Americans aren't doing enough of that right now, at the same time that defined benefit plans are enjoyed by fewer Americans than in the past, as companies reduce or eliminate pensions. Why make it even harder for Americans to prepare for their retirement on their own by saving through 401(k)s? Why tax them so that you can give tax cuts to the very rich?

We Democrats have a better deal to offer the American people on 401(k)s. Rather than having Uncle Sam dip his hands into American retirement plans, we Democrats believe Americans deserve a helping hand when it comes to their retirement. In just a short time, we will release our 401(k) plan.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. STRANGE). The Senator from Connecticut.

GUN VIOLENCE

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, last week, we voted on a judge who felt it necessary to sign up for a lifetime membership with a political organization in order to get his nomination forwarded back before this body.

The judge we voted on last week became a lifetime member of the NRA in between his appointment by President Obama and, then, his appointment by President Trump—a signal, apparently, to the new Republican White House that he would align with their interests and views on issues related to the regulation of firearms in this country.

We are going to see a parade of very interesting choices for the Federal judiciary come through this body, and they are going to be moved in rapid succession, as they are this week. I have been told that never before have we taken four votes on appellate nominees in a single week. Of course, that stands in contrast with the Republican Senate that refused to give even a hearing to one Supreme Court Justice over the entirety of 2016. I think it is worth noting that this body can move fast when it wants to, and yet we watched a Supreme Court seat be stolen by this Senate from a Democratic President who, by constitutional right, had the ability to make that appointment.

I bring up the lifetime membership in the NRA because it is increasingly

clear that you have to signal a level of extremism on issues like firearms in order to get your name brought before this body. That signal is wildly out of step with where the American public is on many of these issues.

I have come to the floor over the course of the last 4 years every few weeks in order to talk about the fact that there is no other country in the world where 80 to 90 people every single day die from guns. The numbers are just absolutely stunning. Some 2,800 people a month die from guns, and 33,000 a year. The majority of those are suicides, but there are record numbers of homicides and accidental shootings in this country. Americans by and large don't accept this rate of slaughter. Americans want us to change our laws, and they don't want a judiciary that is going to stand in the way of Congress's ability to follow the wishes of our constituents.

I have been coming down to the floor to tell the story of the victims. My hope is that, although the data hasn't moved this Congress—90 percent of Americans want stronger gun laws—the data incontrovertibly shows that in places that have universal background checks or laws requiring you to get local permits before you buy a gun, there are less gun crimes.

Maybe if the data doesn't move my colleagues, the story of the victims will. Deon Rodney was shot on October 14 of this year, just a few weeks ago. He was working at Just Right Cutz, where he was a barber, in Bridgeport, CT. He was the 22nd homicide victim in Bridgeport this year.

He had just finished cutting a young boy's hair in a chair when a masked gunman chased somebody else into the barbershop. Police said Deon was protecting the young boy, shielding the young boy from this intruder who came running in. He jumped out of his chair to try to get in between the boy sitting in the barber's chair and the gunman, and the gunman shot him.

The owner of the barber shop said:

Deon had just finished his haircut and the boy was getting ready to go outside when the gunman came in. He saved everyone in the barbershop.

Deon was 31 years old. He left behind his wife, his mother, plenty of other family members, and an 8-year-old daughter.

Speaking about their daughter, Deon's wife said:

He loved her endlessly, unconditionally.

His mother said:

Deon is a part of me. He was my son, but he was also my friend.

His cousin said:

I know that everyone is recognizing his heroism now, but he was always like this. Always a role model and always willing to give. Always willing to go out of his way to help a stranger. Nothing has changed all these years. I guess I'm glad that the masses can now see this.

The owner of the barbershop went on to say of Deon:

He's dead because of these people running around with guns.

There are guns everywhere you look in cities like Bridgeport, New Haven, Hartford, New York or Chicago. People say: Why is that? Why are there all these guns—many of them, if not most of them, illegal guns—if you have strong gun laws in places like New York, Illinois, and Connecticut? The reason is that gun trafficking doesn't recognize State boundaries, and the guns used to commit crimes in places like Connecticut come from outside of Connecticut.

A comprehensive, groundbreaking survey of gun crimes in New York City found that 75 percent of the guns that are used to commit crimes in New York City come from outside of New York State. They come from States with looser gun laws, where you as a criminal can easily buy a gun without having to prove you are a responsible gun owner.

How do all these illegal guns get into Bridgeport such that somebody can turn a corner and walk into a barber-shop with a weapon in their hand? It is because criminals with criminal records go into gun shows in States that don't require background checks at those forums, buy up dozens of weapons, load them into their cars, and then drive up to States with tougher gun laws and sell them on the black market.

Congress willingly allows this to happen because we have not moved our mandatory system of background checks to the places in which gun purchases are made today. Data is a little bit hard to pin down, but anywhere from 25 to 40 percent of gun sales today don't involve a background check. You can understand why. Sales have migrated to online. They have migrated to gun shows. They have gone to places where background checks aren't required.

I mentioned what the data tells us when it comes to background checks. The data tells us background checks save lives. Here is one slice of the data. In States that have universal background check laws, 47 percent fewer women get shot by an intimate partner than States without universal background check laws. That is because, in the heat of passion, domestic abusers often go to get a weapon and use it to perpetuate a domestic violence crime. You can't do that if you have a domestic violence history in a State with a universal background check law because wherever you go, you are going to be prohibited from buying that weapon.

Since November of 1998, more than 2.4 million gun sales to prohibited purchasers have been prevented because of background checks; 2½ million people who were criminals or who were addicts or who were seriously mentally ill were stopped from buying guns because of our background check laws. Because we now have at least one-quarter of all sales happening without background checks, that means there are hundreds of thousands of criminals,