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Senate

The Senate met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. GRASSLEY).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Almighty God, our hope for years to come, show us how to live victoriously each day. Lead us to a place of understanding in spite of challenges and difficulties. Lord, make us more than conquerors because of Your power and love. Today, inspire our lawmakers to strive to do Your will. As they perform their daily tasks, guide them in the selection of their priorities. Lord, show them Your truth so they will be instruments of Your purposes. When their light of hope is threatened, renew them with faith in Your providence and mercy.

We pray in Your strong Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The President pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. HYDE-SMITH). The majority leader is recognized.

MUELLER REPORT

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, it has now been more than 6 weeks since Special Counsel Bob Mueller, the former FBI Director, concluded his investigation into Russia's interference in our 2016 election and delivered his findings to the Justice Department. It has been 2 weeks since Attorney Gen-

eral William Barr made the 450-page report public. This investigation went on for 2 years. It is finally over.

Many Americans were waiting to see how their elected officials would respond. With an exhaustive investigation complete, would the country finally unify to confront the real challenges before us? Would we finally be able to move on from partisan paralysis and breathless conspiracy theorizing or would we remain consumed by unhinged partisanship and keep dividing ourselves to the point that Putin and his agents would need only to stand on the sidelines and watch us as their job would actually be done for them? Regrettably, the answer is pretty obvious.

So that is what I want to discuss this morning—Russia's interference in American elections, the special counsel's and the Attorney General's work, and how we can finally end this "Groundhog Day" spectacle, stop endlessly relitigating a 2½-year-old election result, and move forward for the American people.

Now, it bears remembering what this investigation was actually supposed to be about—Russian interference in 2016. For many of the President's opponents, it quickly morphed into something else—a last hope that maybe they would never have to come to terms with the American people's choice of a President. In some corners, Special Counsel Mueller came to be regarded as a kind of secular saint who was destined to rescue the country from the inconvenient truth that the American people actually elected Donald Trump. For 2 years, many of the President's opponents seemed to be hoping the worst conspiracy theories would actually be true. They seemed to be hoping for a national crisis for the sake of their own politics.

Look, I will say it was at least heartening to see many of my Democratic colleagues and the media abruptly awaken to the dangers of Russian ag-

gression. Remember, not long ago, the Democrats mocked Republicans like John McCain and MITT ROMNEY for warning about the dangers posed by Putin's Russia.

Remember President Obama's quip back in 2012, when then-Governor Romney emphasized his concerns with Russia? Here is what President Obama said when MITT ROMNEY emphasized his concerns about Russia back in 2012: "The 1980s are now calling to ask for their foreign policy back." That was President Obama in 2012. Well, I think many of us now see that President Obama's approach to Russia could have used some more of the 1980s—more Ronald Reagan and less Jimmy Carter.

We would have been better off if the Obama administration had not swept Putin's invasion and occupation of Georgia under the rug or had not looked away as Russia forced out Western NGOs and cracked down on civil society; if President Obama had not let Assad trample his redline on Syria or had not embraced Putin's fake deal on chemical weapons; if the Obama administration had responded firmly to Putin's invasion and occupation of Ukraine in 2014, to the assassination of Boris Nemtsov in 2015, and to Russia's intervention in Syria. Maybe stronger leadership would have left the Kremlin less emboldened. Maybe tampering with our democracy wouldn't have seemed so very tempting.

Instead, the previous administration sent the Kremlin the signal it could get away with almost anything. So is it surprising that we got the brazen interference detailed in Special Counsel Mueller's report or a concerted effort to divide Americans through social media campaigns or the hacking into the email accounts and networks of the Clinton campaign and the Democratic Party?

Thanks to the investigation, we know more about these tactics. Thanks to the investigation, 13 Russian nationals, 3 Russian companies, and 12 more

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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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.