

business as usual, but Putin's aggression continued full bore.

There was the failure to respond to Putin's efforts to strangle democracy in his own country by shuttering western NGOs, arresting dissidents, or possibly ordering the murder of political opponent Boris Nemtsov.

To the extent that the United States responded to the torture and murder by Russian authorities of lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, it was due to congressional pressure.

There was also President Obama's response to Putin's invasion of Ukraine in 2014. Do any of my colleagues believe the administration's response to that outrageous assault on the sovereignty of Ukraine was sufficiently tough to defend against Putin's outrageous assault on fundamental principles of sovereignty and the international order?

There was the debacle with the President's redline in Syria, which turned out to be more like a red carpet for Russian influence in Syria and the Middle East.

And there was the President telling Putin's puppet Medvedev that he could have more "flexibility" to treat Russia differently once he became a lameduck.

All this was under a President who thought it was a clever laugh line to mock our now-colleague Senator ROMNEY for correctly labeling Russia as a threat.

The consequences of American weakness toward Russia were numerous. The more Obama gave, the more Putin took.

Among those consequences, as we all know, was that Putin felt sufficiently emboldened to seek to interfere in our 2016 Presidential election. Through efforts to divide Americans on social media and to hack a political party, agents of a foreign government sought to inject division, doubt, and chaos into our democracy—a sad and embarrassing episode.

President Trump has expressed an interest in a better relationship with Russia, but the actions his administration has taken—which he has authorized—demonstrate that such a relationship will not prevent America from pushing back against Russian aggression.

The administration has pushed back against Russia in meaningful ways, imposing new costs on Putin and his cronies for their malign activities and improving our defenses against Russian active measures. We have adopted new national security and defense strategies that treat Russian aggression like the serious threat that it is. We have begun to rebuild our military strength, which was eroded by years of budget cuts and further damaged by sequestration. We have taken steps to provide Georgia and Ukraine with arms to defend against Russian aggression—weapons denied to them by the previous administration despite bipartisan support from Congress. We worked to block Moscow's efforts to increase European reliance on Russian oil and gas. Sec-

retary Mattis led efforts—continued by his successors—to reform and strengthen NATO.

So important changes are underway at the strategic level. Now we are back to projecting the strength, principle, and resolve that America ought to project.

In addition, the Trump administration has also punched back in very specific ways in response to the election interference that happened on the Obama administration's watch. Thanks to the work of the Special Counsel and the Department of Justice, 28 Russian nationals, intelligence officers, and corporate interests were indicted for their participation in the interference. And in 2018, the administration expelled another 60 Russian agents in response to the poisoning of a former official living in the United Kingdom. These agents are no longer free to conduct intelligence operations or active measures here in America.

These are all tough, important steps that pertain to our broader foreign policy efforts to defer future threats, but there has also been significant work done specifically on our election security. The administration worked quickly to address vulnerabilities and ensure that 2018 wouldn't be a reprise of 2016.

The administration directed resources through the Department of Homeland Security to help local election authorities implement stronger cybersecurity measures. Information sharing was streamlined between DHS, FBI, and State and local officials.

They worked hard to gain the trust of State election officials in my State of Kentucky and around the country and provide them with valuable information through a voluntary information-sharing program that has seen participation from all 50 States and 1,400 localities.

Here in Congress, we appropriated hundreds of millions of dollars in additional aid for State governments to strengthen their systems, and our efforts continue. This year's Defense and Intelligence authorization bills include provisions that will help defend ourselves and our allies against Russian aggression.

The administration will brief us today in classified session about the many steps U.S. agencies have taken since 2016 to improve our defenses and bolster our deterrence against adversaries who seek to undermine our democracy.

The smooth and secure execution of the 2018 election illustrates the success of these measures. This was not a coincidence.

Congress has taken even further action since then, building new legislative safeguards to increase transparency and coordination with the intelligence community on election security.

In short, it is abundantly clear that the administration and Congress take this issue seriously. I look forward to hearing more from the administration

today about what steps have led to this greater success and what even further safeguards they are working on in advance of 2020.

Of course, Congress will need to continue closely monitoring the progress and assess whether future legislative steps might be needed as well. But, as with any time when Washington politicians are clamoring to grab greater control over something this important, we need to make sure this conversation is clear-eyed and sober and serious.

I remember it was President Obama's first Chief of Staff who said: "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste." In other words, bad news can give politicians cover to do things they have wanted to do for a long time.

Remember, it was only months ago that the new Democratic majority in the House decided their top priority for the entire Congress was a massive bill I called the Democratic politician protection act—a sprawling Federal power grab over election law and citizens' political speech.

Among other provisions, it would make the FEC, the currently non-partisan body that regulates political speech, into a partisan weapon.

They also want to give Washington more power to prohibit citizens groups from weighing in on politicians' job performance. They have twice passed bills aimed at centralizing election administration decisions in the Federal Government, in part on the hope that election attorneys, not voters, will get to determine the outcome of more elections—provision after provision that would erode longstanding safeguards. That was the huge proposal just a few months ago.

In light of this, it is interesting that some of our colleagues across the aisle seem to have already made up their minds before we hear from the experts later today that a brandnew, sweeping Washington intervention is just what the doctor ordered.

I, for one, am looking forward to listening to the experts, to hearing more about why the Trump administration was more successful in 2018 than the Obama administration was in 2016. I look forward to ensuring that any additional Federal action actually addresses the problems at hand; that it preserve, rather than undermine, the careful checks and balances that have long been key parts of American democracy since the beginning.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

Mr. McCONNELL. Madam President, I understand there are two bills at the desk due for a second reading en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will read the bills by title for the second time.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 2740) making appropriations for the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education, and related agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2020, and for other purposes.

A bill (H.R. 3055) making appropriations for the Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science, and Related Agencies for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2020, and for other purposes.

Mr. MCCONNELL. In order to place the measures on the calendar under the provisions of rule XIV, I would object to further proceedings en bloc.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection having been heard, the bills will be placed on the calendar.

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 and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read the nomination of T. Kent Wetherell II, of Florida, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Florida.

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CRAMER). The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Democratic leader is recognized.

BORDER SECURITY

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, a new report from NBC News last night detailed the inhumane treatment of migrant children at the Arizona border stations: allegations of sexual assault, retaliation by Customs and Border Protection officers, overcrowding, lack of showers, lack of clean clothes, and lack of space to sleep. The accounts made by dozens of children at these facilities are horrifying and are completely unacceptable.

In the wake of several similar reports about the treatment of migrants by CBP officers in Texas, in the wake of revelations of secret Facebook groups where Border Patrol officers joke about the horrid treatment of migrants, it is abundantly clear that there is a toxic culture at Border Patrol that can only be changed—only be changed—by the immediate firing and replacing of top leadership at the Agency. CBP needs to

clean house. The top people at CBP ought to be fired now.

In just a few days on the job, Mark Morgan, the Acting Commissioner, has already shown himself to be far too callous about the way in which children and their families are treated. We need committed law enforcement professionals to take over the CBP, particularly those who have training and expertise in working with vulnerable populations.

There are rumors that Mr. Morgan was chosen because he is a tough guy—a tough guy—on kids. But he is a tough guy who will tolerate an out-of-control culture in many parts of the CBP.

It is a perfectly wrong choice for what is going on there. I will say this to President Trump. He is not going to help you. Whatever Americans' views are on immigration, they don't like pictures of little children in squalid and awful conditions, whoever they are.

The Acting Secretary of Homeland Security, Kevin McAleenan, who oversees CBP, needs to take this matter into his own hands. He has shown far more balance, far more expertise, and far more ability to talk about the truth—not some ideology—than Morgan or some of the others. He should take this matter into his own hands and pursue changes to the Agency that go beyond mere investigations and reports.

CBP needs a real change in personnel and in leadership, and it needs it now. The reports by NBC News and many others are a stain on this great Nation. We are not perfect. We are a lot better than most everyone else. But in the past, when there was a problem, we didn't revel in it; we tried to solve it. We cannot allow what is happening at the border to continue.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Mr. President, on another matter, a few weeks ago, it was reported that the author of a blatantly, virulently anti-Semitic cartoon depicting the Rothschilds and Soros was invited—actually invited to a social media summit at the White House. Up until yesterday, when the White House was asked questions about why he was invited, there was no answer. Reportedly, some in the administration privately defended the invitation of this out-and-out bigot. Only last night when it all became public did the White House finally revoke the invitation. But it is an absolute disgrace that it was extended in the first place and that it took them long to rescind. And it is a disgrace that the White House has not rescinded the invitations for several other individuals planning to attend who have spewed hateful and bigoted views online.

The plain truth is this: This President and this administration are shockingly willing to provide succor to some of the most hateful ideologues, ideologies, and viewpoints. The President has promoted White supremacists on his Twitter feed while constantly criticizing social media platforms for

removing hateful content. In doing so, he has defended people like Alex Jones and his detestable, conspiracy-ridden radio show.

The idea that everybody should be able to post on social media sites no matter how disgusting the content is wrong, in my view. When vicious, racist, anti-Semitic, and Islamophobic hate speech is posted online, social media sites, as private companies, should be able to remove that content. But this President amazingly seems to believe that when offensive language is coming from a rightwing source and it is taken off social media sites, that is censorship. That is the message this social media summit seeks to advance, and it is un-American.

At the same time, we hear that the White House and congressional Republicans are all too eager to decry anti-Semitism when they perceive it from a political opponent on the left. Well, where are those folks when the White House does something like this? Where are they? It seems some of our friends on the other side of the aisle want to politicize the issue of anti-Semitism, which should be condemned when anybody talks about it, but unfortunately we heard silence from our Republican friends when this virulently anti-Semitic cartoonist was invited to the White House—not a peep. And what he did was despicable and reminiscent of what was done before dictatorships took over in Europe.

The White House was right to revoke the invitation. It never should have been issued in the first place. A social media summit designed to give support to the most radical viewpoints on social media should never have been planned by the White House in the first place. It should be obvious, but with this President, unfortunately, the obvious bears repeating: The President of the United States should appeal to the better angels of our nature and not provide support to the basest voices in our society. It is another reason this Presidency is just a disgrace—a disgrace in terms of American values, American morals, and American honesty.

ELECTION SECURITY

Mr. President, now on election security, later this afternoon, Members from both sides of the aisle will take part in an all-Senate briefing on the threats faced by our elections in the 2020 campaign cycle. We are all no doubt aware of the general threat to our elections from foreign interference. It is crucial to hear from our law enforcement, defense, and intelligence communities about the specific nature of those threats and, just as important—probably more important—how we can counteract them and how we can prevent foreign interference in the 2020 election, which everybody, regardless of party—Democratic, Republican, liberal, or conservative—should be against. This is one of the things the Founding Fathers were most afraid of, that foreign powers would seek to