

head to the polls to cast their ballots in an election that, by necessity, will be conducted in a much different fashion than in nearly any election in our Nation's history. Because of COVID-19, there will likely be a historic increase in mail-in ballots.

Mail-in voting is a process that is well established in our country. Several States have conducted elections this way for years without any issue at all. Because of COVID-19, there may also be some delays in determining the results of the election while every ballot is counted. This, too, has happened before, but there is no doubt that this election will be unique, and it means that leaders from both sides of the aisle should be joining together now to ensure the integrity of the election and the public's confidence in the result.

Sadly, there are some who are systematically undermining public confidence in the voting process and irresponsibly fanning suspicions and conspiracy theories about the legitimacy of election results. At the top of the list here is, unfortunately, once again, the President of the United States, who has exploited and capitalized on fears about holding an election in the middle of COVID-19 to attack mail-in voting and to advance comically false claims of widespread voter fraud. The President has done both of those. He has attacked mail-in voting and made these false claims of fraud.

We are talking about the integrity of our elections here. This is the wellspring of our democracy. It is fundamental for our country, something that American soldiers have fought and died for—and the President trifles with it, and, of course, our Senate Republican colleagues go along.

So, today, we are doing two things in this regard because we have a responsibility to do everything we can to see that this election does not mark the beginning of a new age when our election results are doubted, conspiracy theories flourish, and our grand democracy is tarnished around the world. If we allow this kind of malicious tampering with the wellspring of our democracy in terms of people's trust in it, it is the beginning of the end.

Donald Trump doesn't care. We know he only cares about himself. The Senate Republicans don't say a peep. We know they are afraid of Donald Trump. Even when they disagree with him, they remain quiet, and too often they agree with him.

We cannot allow our people to lose faith in elections, and we must do everything to ensure that they are conducted in a fair way that the American people will accept, despite COVID and all the problems it creates.

So, this morning, Senator SANDERS and I have written a letter to the Republican leader asking him to work with us to establish a special bipartisan committee with equal representation from both parties to guarantee the integrity of our election process.

The committee should focus on three issues: one, confirm the security of and

confidence in our mail-in systems, our vote-by-mail systems; two, measures to ensure that every vote is counted; and three, discuss and prepare for possible postelection scenarios.

The function of the committee would be to hold hearings about what is being done around the country to make certain that our public institutions are prepared to conduct a smooth and reliable election, free from voter suppression and intimidation, that every vote will be counted and there will be confidence in the outcome.

Senator SANDERS and I and many in our caucus—including Senator KLOBUCHAR, whom I will mention in a minute—feel very, very strongly that we have to do something, and this bipartisan committee can ensure the American people that the Senate is on top of this.

We hope the Republican leader will accept our request. We hope he will not run away from his responsibility to ensure there are fair elections. We hope that he will not go along with Donald Trump's dangerous rhetoric about the fairness of our elections.

Later today, the Senator from Minnesota and ranking member of the Rules Committee, Senator KLOBUCHAR, and I will be speaking with a bipartisan group of secretaries of state. We will be getting a briefing on the state of our election preparedness around the country. I expect they will reiterate their call for another major priority being blocked by Senate Republicans: election assistance funding.

I am hopeful we can still find agreement on a bipartisan basis to help our States with critical funding to prepare for this historic election. This issue is above partisan politics. It is the essence of our democracy. It is disgraceful that Republicans are playing games with this—perhaps for electoral advantage, perhaps for fear of President Trump—but we will not let it happen.

We, as a caucus, repeat to the American people: The best way to prevent an election from being manipulated or stolen is to vote. The more people who vote and the earlier they vote, when they can vote early, the better off our democracy will be.

RUSSIA

Madam President, now, on Russian disinformation, another matter, the chairman of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs continues to further his probe into the family of the former Vice President and plans to release a report next week that appears designed to influence the upcoming Presidential election.

While the rest of the country has been focused on fighting the global pandemic, for the last few months, the chairman and Republicans of the committee have wasted taxpayer resources to run a hit job on President Trump's political rival. Even worse, it seems that several lines of investigation have echoed materials pushed by the Kremlin.

In fact, some of the allegations that the Homeland Security chairman pursues are the same ones propagated by Andriy Derkach, a known Russian agent who was recently sanctioned by President Trump's own Department of the Treasury for interfering in our election. So here President Trump's Department of the Treasury sanctions Derkach, and the chairman of the committee repeats the same kind of discredited allegations that Derkach propagates. It is outrageous. It is a disgrace.

The hearings and subpoenas that have come out of the Homeland Security Committee are also a disgrace by any standard. The more we learn about Russian agents like Mr. Derkach, the more it looks like the Kremlin is trying to launder anti-American information through the U.S. Senate, and because Moscow prefers to support Donald Trump, as it did in the last election, it seems that some of this disinformation finds a sympathetic audience among Republican Senators.

So today, alongside Senators WYDEN, PETERS, REED, and FEINSTEIN, I will be introducing a resolution calling for a cessation of any Senate investigation or activity that allows Congress to act as a conduit for Russian information. There should not be a single aspect of this Chamber that, wittingly or unwittingly, furthers the propaganda machine of Vladimir Putin's intelligence services.

I will have more to say on this matter later, but for one of the most important committees to be echoing a Kremlin-backed conspiracy theory is beyond the pale. As we are about to hold a national election, it must stop immediately.

VENEZUELA

Madam President, finally, later today my friends Senators DURBIN, MENENDEZ, and VAN HOLLEN will come to the floor to try again to secure temporary protected status for Venezuelans seeking refuge here in the United States. There are roughly 200,000 eligible Venezuelans in the United States who are now at risk of being sent back to a failed and dangerous nation, rife with political repression and human suffering—a nation that, under Maduro's regime, constitutes the single biggest humanitarian crisis in our hemisphere today.

Despite having all the authority that he needs to solve this problem on his own, President Trump will not grant temporary protected status, and his enablers in the Senate have repeatedly blocked passage of House legislation that would provide it. So we are going to try once again to get this passed.

Democrats stand with the people of Venezuela. Later today, my Republican colleagues will need to decide if they want to restore the moral leadership of the United States and support the protection of Venezuelans fleeing violence and despair or leave them all in limbo, facing deportation to a humanitarian disaster.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

NATIONAL DEBT

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, in the beginning of September, the Congressional Budget Office issued its latest budget outlook. The news wasn't good. CBO announced that next year our country's debt is projected to exceed the amount of our gross domestic product. In other words, the size of our debt will be greater than the size of our economy. That is a very bad position to be in.

Countries with that kind of debt-to-GDP ratio face time-sensitive decisions if they want to avert an all-out economic crisis. Greece is just one recent example. We all know the kind of economic devastation and accompanying turmoil that Greece has experienced in recent years.

Now, as the United States, we can probably hang on a little longer than most other countries before entering a full-blown debt crisis. It is helpful that our economy was surging before being waylaid by the onset of the coronavirus, but even we can't hang on forever. Sooner or later, if we don't address the size of our soaring debt, we are going to have a problem—a lot of problems, in fact.

That is not something most of my colleagues across the aisle want to hear. They would like to spend as much as they want, whenever they want, on whatever new government program that they have come up with, and they imply that Republicans are miserly for not wanting to join them.

Republicans, Democrats imply or sometimes say, just don't care about the ordinary Americans who would supposedly benefit from Democrats' spending. In fact, the opposite is true. In the face of the pandemic, Republicans have been willing to spend huge sums to help our fellow Americans weather this crisis, and Republicans are worried about our spending and our debt precisely because we care deeply about ordinary Americans. We know what the consequences of unchecked debt and spending can be, and we want to protect Americans from those consequences.

To start with, the larger our debt grows, the more interest we are likely to have to pay—and we are already paying a lot. Right now, we are paying roughly \$484 billion a year in interest on our debt. That is a substantial chunk of our yearly budget, and that is money that could otherwise be going to other priorities.

And the problem has only snowballed. By 2029, the yearly interest on our debt is projected to reach \$807 bil-

lion, according to one estimate. Now, that is going to eat up a lot—a lot—of money that could otherwise be spent on important investments: healthcare, veterans, infrastructure, defense, seniors, education. We would have a lot more money to devote to those priorities if we weren't paying hundreds of billions in interest each year on our debt.

Then there are the economic consequences of a huge debt: The economy will struggle. Unemployment will grow. Businesses will create fewer jobs, if they create jobs at all. Wages and benefits will likely stagnate. The stock market will struggle.

We have had to borrow a lot of money this year to meet the coronavirus crisis, and there is no doubt it is money we needed to borrow. That happens sometimes during a crisis. But we need to be very aware of the fact that we have driven up our deficit by \$3.3 trillion just this fiscal year, further increasing our Nation's debt, and we need to be very careful about any additional borrowing and ensure we are borrowing only what is absolutely necessary.

Republicans have caught a lot of flak from Democrats for not being willing to use the coronavirus as an excuse for unchecked government spending, including for noncoronavirus-related measures, but we have made a priority of scrutinizing additional spending because we don't want to get our country out of one economic crisis only to plunge it into another. Unfortunately, that is a lesson that is lost on many of my Democratic colleagues.

We think the debt is bad now, and it is, but it is nothing like what our debt will look like if Democrats take Congress and the White House in November and start putting some of their bigger spending plans into effect—plans like Medicare for All, which would cost, as a conservative estimate, \$32 trillion over 10 years; or the Green New Deal, Democrats' \$93 trillion boondoggle.

That is right, Madam President; you didn't mishear that. The Green New Deal is estimated to cost over \$93 trillion over 10 years. To put that in perspective, the size of the entire Federal budget in 2019 was \$4.4 trillion, or substantially less than the cost of 1 year of the Green New Deal.

Now, you might think a pie-in-the-sky fantasy like the Green New Deal would have been abandoned by Democrats by now, but you would be wrong. More than a year after its introduction, it is apparently still going strong.

Yesterday, I spoke on the floor about Democrats' threat to eliminate the legislative filibuster in the Senate, and that is the Senate rule that helps ensure that bills that come before the Senate require bipartisan cooperation.

Shortly before I spoke, the Senator from Massachusetts, who introduced the Green New Deal resolution in the Senate, appeared on National Public Radio, where he was asked whether he thought there were any parts of the

Green New Deal that could attract bipartisan support. The Senator's response: The whole thing needs to be enacted—and if Republicans don't allow that to happen, Democrats should change the Senate rules to eliminate the legislative filibuster.

Apparently, Democrats aren't willing to even moderate their proposal. If the Senator from Massachusetts has his way, Democrats will shove the entire \$93 trillion down the throats of the American people. I guess the American people will just have to survive the resulting debt crisis.

When you ask about the pricetag for Democrats' socialist fantasies, Democrats will make noise about somehow paying for it. We will tax the rich, they say. The rich, they say, aren't paying their fair share. The problem, of course, is that increasing taxes on the rich isn't going to pay for these proposals.

You could tax not only the rich but a good portion of middle class at rates nearly 100 percent and not come up anywhere close to getting \$93 trillion that would be necessary to pay for the Green New Deal.

There is, in fact, no way to pay for these proposals. They will be financed by enormous additions to our national debt, and ordinary Americans will suffer the consequences: a shrinking economy, fewer jobs, lost jobs, lower wages, lack of opportunity, and much more.

I hope we will take action on our debt before it is too late. One thing we have to consider is how to shore up and protect Social Security and Medicare, which are currently the main drivers of our national debt. Thanks to an aging Baby Boomer population, these programs are under a great deal of strain.

My colleague from Utah, Senator ROMNEY, recently introduced legislation, called the TRUST Act, to begin to address these endangered trust funds and to start to rein in our national debt. Bipartisan legislation like this would be a good start to preventing our country from facing an economic crisis in the coming decades.

The Republican Senators sponsoring the legislation were joined by a handful of Democrats, which gives me hope that perhaps not all of my Democratic colleagues are determined to explode our national debt with their socialist fantasies.

Unfortunately, too many Democrats—including the Democrats' Vice Presidential candidate—are open to bankrupting Americans with the Green New Deal and other plans. I hope they will not have the chance to implement their legislation because our economy and the American people might never recover from the consequences.

I yield floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Ohio.

WORKPLACE SAFETY

Mr. BROWN. Madam President, it is pretty obvious that my Republican colleagues think that the Presiding Officer is going to lose her race and a number of incumbent Senators are going to