

Now, for the last 4 years, thanks to the actions of this Senate and the leadership of the current administration, a huge number of dedicated experts have worked hard to improve our defenses and regain America's trust.

In 2016, the Department of Homeland Security was on an island, but under this administration, DHS officials have built partnerships with State and local officials who run our elections and stood up massive intelligence-sharing efforts that connect them with Federal authorities, the intelligence community, as well as the private sector.

In 2016, the outgoing administration hid their limited grasp of the threat from Congress and the American people. The Trump administration and intelligence experts have been far, far more transparent.

In 2016, only 14 State or local authorities had high-tech sensors to detect cyberattacks. Now all 50 States—all of them—have them. The Trump administration has imposed real pain on Russia: closing consulates, expelling spies, sanctioning oligarchs and agents of influence, and equipping neighbors that are threatened by Moscow to deter further aggression.

Here in the Senate, multiple committees have become major players in this effort. Our colleagues on the Intelligence Committee spent, literally, years producing their 5-part, 1,300-plus-page report on what happened back in 2016. Some of their bipartisan recommendations are already taking effect.

And then there is funding. The Senate has led the efforts to set aside more than \$1 billion in extra election assistance, from foreign interference to COVID-19. Through the end of the primaries, more than 70 percent of the huge sum we provided in the CARES Act is still unspent. As recently as a few months ago, more than 60 percent of the first tranche we provided all the way back in fiscal 2018 was still unspent. So we have made sure money is not an obstacle.

So these threats are still with us, and they have evolved. Not only Russia but also China, Iran, and other adversaries are looking constantly for ways to interfere in our politics, divide Americans, and erode confidence in our institutions. That is a fact.

The work goes on, but we certainly aren't flat-footed any longer. This progress should be cause for bipartisan celebration, but one side of the aisle seems to prefer pretending—pretending—there hasn't been any progress at all.

Frankly, while nonpartisan experts worked around the clock to fight our adversaries' destabilizing efforts, too many Democrats have been undermining America's confidence in our democracy to the degree that those adversaries could only dream of: baseless accusations that the last election was stolen; casual assertions that this one, too, must be illegitimate if they don't win.

On a monthly basis, we have heard new, hysterical pronouncements that our democracy was on death's door. Even sensitive intelligence became grist for the partisan mill.

This has not been universal. There has been good bipartisan work in some committees, but the Democratic leadership appeared to make a conscious choice: Instead of treating election security like the unifying, bipartisan issue it ought to be, they would use it as a partisan cudgel to hit the other side, playing right into our adversaries' hands.

This week, the Democratic leader attacked Republicans and basically questioned our patriotism because we did not rush to meet his latest demands for empty theatrics. He proposes to crowd out 4 years of bipartisan work from actual committees by inventing a brandnew Senate committee and pull experts off the frontlines during the home stretch for theatrical hearings here on Capitol Hill.

He says we must allocate more money. Never mind that the millions and millions of dollars we have already set aside remain unspent. He proposes that the administration pull experts off the frontlines to continue briefing him. Never mind that ODNI alone has supported 53 election security briefings to Congress since 2018—53 election security briefings to Congress since 2018. I am sure 54 will be the magic number that finally makes our colleague a reasonable voice on this issue.

The truth is, briefings are ongoing; the Intelligence and Armed Services Committees will be briefed this week; and all Senators will have access to written intelligence analysis by career professionals if new developments arise since last month's all-Senate briefings.

The Democratic leader's demands aren't solutions. These aren't what the experts say we need; they are just empty gestures concocted so the Democratic leader can complain that Republicans hate democracy and apple pie when we don't go along with them.

So remember, fear and division, reduced confidence in our democracy, Americans divided against ourselves: that is exactly what Russia wants—exactly. That is what China wants too. That is just what our adversaries want to achieve, and it is exactly what the Democratic leader helps them achieve when he turns a bipartisan national issue that should unite us into one more pretext for partisan finger-pointing.

Our colleague from New York said recently that "Republicans are the enemy of the good." No, Republicans and Democrats are not enemies. No fellow Americans are enemies.

Our people, our democracy, have real enemies in some corners of the world. I expect they are absolutely thrilled to hear our own politicians talking that way.

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

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of Franklin Ulyses Valderrama, of Illinois, to be United States District Judge for the Northern District of Illinois.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority whip.

#### HOT SPRINGS VA FACILITY

Mr. THUNE. Madam President, South Dakota's veterans and the Hot Springs community are currently celebrating the VA's announcement that it has begun the process of rescinding its order to close the Hot Springs VA facility. This was a hard-fought victory in a battle that we weren't always sure we would win. It started almost a decade ago, in 2011, when the Obama administration announced its plans to realign—when I say "realign," reclose—the Hot Springs VA facility.

I was well aware of what the Hot Springs facility means to South Dakota veterans and to the entire Hot Springs community, and I determined that there wasn't going to be a closure if I could help it. I knew that closing the Hot Springs facility would put accessible care out of the reach of a lot of rural and Tribal veterans—not only rural and Tribal South Dakota veterans but rural and Tribal veterans from neighboring Wyoming and Nebraska who depend on the Hot Springs facility for care.

Traveling to Rapid City and Fort Meade for care, as the VA proposed, would be a real hardship, if not an impossibility, for many of these veterans. I also strongly disagreed with moving not only medical care but the vital Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Program from Hot Springs. Not only would this put the program out of reach of some veterans, I believed it was also a mistake to remove a tremendously effective program from the place where it has been so successful and try to reconstitute it elsewhere.

I got to work in Congress, along with other Members of the South Dakota delegation. My first priority was simply trying to get Hot Springs' veterans a hearing with the VA.

In 2016, after years of trying, we persuaded then-VA Secretary Bob McDonald to visit Hot Springs. Unfortunately, the visit didn't work, and soon

after the Secretary signed an order finalizing the decision to close the majority of the facility.

The battle wasn't over. In 2014, I had succeeded in attaching a measure to an appropriations legislation prohibiting the closure of the Hot Springs facility until a national VA realignment strategy was proposed. In each year, with appreciation to the Appropriations Committee, I have managed to renew this measure. And after a new VA Secretary—Secretary Robert Wilkie—took the helm, I repeatedly urged him to come to Hot Springs and to check out our facility for himself. Early this year, the Secretary announced that he would visit the facility in March.

I then organized a letter with the rest of the South Dakota delegation strongly urging the Secretary to make time to sit down with Hot Springs veterans and other stakeholders and listen to their concerns about the planned closure. To our great gratitude, the Secretary agreed.

Early in Secretary Wilkie's visit to Hot Springs on March 2, I requested that he revisit the order to close the facility signed over 3 years ago. A bit to our surprise and much to our relief, the Secretary agreed, reassuring us that the Hot Springs VA would remain open for our veterans.

That meeting with veterans was pivotal. I worked hard in Congress—along with other Members of the South Dakota delegation—to keep the Hot Springs facility open. But the campaign would never have succeeded without the passion of Hot Springs veterans and the Hot Springs community, which rallied in support of the facility and have proposed innovative ideas for the campus's future. And meeting with these veterans and other stakeholders and hearing their thoughts and stories played a major role in Secretary Wilkie's decision.

Now, 2020 has been a tough year. But even in tough times, good things can happen. And last week's announcement that the VA has begun the formal process of rescinding its order to close the Hot Springs facility, expected to take 30 to 60 days, has given a lot of us reason for gratitude. I am thankful to Secretary Wilkie for taking a real look at South Dakota veterans' concerns and reversing the VA's decision to close the facility. And I look forward to celebrating with South Dakota veterans the next time I am in Hot Springs—or, as a lot of us know it, the "Veterans Town."

#### AGRICULTURE

Mr. President, while most sectors of our economy were thriving before the coronavirus pandemic hit, farmers and ranchers were struggling. Low prices, extended trade disputes, and natural disasters had meant a lot of tough years for agriculture producers even before the arrival of the coronavirus.

Yesterday, I held virtual meetings with South Dakota farmers and ranchers and heard firsthand about the challenges they are facing because of the pandemic.

Agriculture is the lifeblood of my home State of South Dakota, and making sure our ag producers have what they need to keep feeding our Nation—and the world—is one of my top priorities here in Washington.

During debate on the CARES Act—our largest coronavirus relief bill to date—I fought to make sure that we included relief for farmers and ranchers. The final bill included \$14 billion for the Commodity Credit Corporation, plus an additional \$9.5 billion in emergency support to allow the Department of Agriculture to provide income and price support for farmers and ranchers.

USDA has been putting these resources to work to provide assistance to producers in South Dakota and across the country who were affected by the pandemic, and they have been a lifeline to many farmers. But more needs to be done to support our Nation's agriculture industry. And part of doing that is funding the Commodity Credit Corporation in the continuing resolution—the appropriations measure that hopefully Congress will be considering soon.

The Commodity Credit Corporation ensures that USDA has the resources it needs to provide assistance through farm programs, including the programs included in the bipartisan 2018 farm bill—commodity programs like the Agriculture Risk Coverage, we call it the ARC Program; the Price Loss Coverage, what we call the PLC Program; and Marketing Assistance Loans; dairy programs like the Dairy Margin programs; disaster programs, like the Livestock Forage Disaster Program; and the Livestock Indemnity Program.

These programs are a critical part of farmers and ranchers' safety net, and we need to ensure that they are fully funded.

Later this morning, my colleague Senator HOEVEN from North Dakota will be hosting a colloquy to draw attention to the need to get USDA the resources it requires to help our agriculture producers weather this crisis. I appreciate Senator HOEVEN's work to highlight this issue, and I hope my Democratic colleagues will hear agriculture producers' concerns.

I see my colleague, the chairman of the Agriculture Committee—the committee on which I serve—is here as well to talk about these issues and to point to the need to ensure that we are doing everything we can to support our Nation's farmers and ranchers during this time of incredible challenge.

I look forward to working with the chairman of the Ag Committee and our other colleagues from our agriculture States—many of whom will be here momentarily to talk about this issue—to help our ranchers and farmers face down the challenges that are in front of them.

I urge my Democratic colleagues to work with Republicans to make sure that USDA has the resources it needs to support our agricultural producers—the men and women who feed not only this country but the entire world.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Kansas.

Mr. ROBERTS. Madam President, I want to thank Senator THUNE for his very pertinent and cogent remarks. This is an important time to make a decision that affects all farmers and ranchers and growers all across our country during a time in which we are going through some very difficult times—weather and everything else that you can imagine.

I see Senator ERNST over there, who will be following me, I am assuming.

I want to thank Senator HOEVEN for reserving this time, as other members of the Agricultural Committee come and speak on an issue that we shouldn't really be having an issue.

As I said, I rise to engage in a colloquy on the importance of providing certainty and predictability. Those were the watch words we used when we passed the farm bill. To our Nation's farmers, ranchers, and growers, by replenishing the Commodity Credit Corporation, there should not be an issue.

First, I would like to thank Senator HOEVEN, who has just arrived on the floor, for his leadership and speaking to this issue, and other Senators for their commitment to agriculture in their respective States and across the country. No matter what they grow or where they live, farmers, ranchers, and growers have done their part to ensure the U.S. food, fiber, and fuel supply continues without disruption during these unprecedented times.

I think everybody is familiar with the situation. Every 5 years, Congress passes legislation that sets the national agriculture, nutrition, conservation, and forestry policy—commonly referred to as the farm bill. That is our commitment, and we did that. These are for the folks on the frontlines, in the fields, caring for livestock, managing the lands day in and day out, despite all the weather problems we are having today.

As chairman of this committee—the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee—we were successful in passing the 2018 farm bill in a bipartisan manner. Everybody says: Oh, we have to work together to get back to where we were bipartisan. We were. Eighty-seven Members in this Chamber voted in favor of this legislation.

That vote demonstrated that the 2018 farm bill did provide much certainty and predictability to all farmers and ranchers across all regions and all crops. However, it is no secret that times continue to remain tough in farm country. Farmers and ranchers continue to experience low commodity prices, a global pandemic, natural disasters, and the effects of retaliatory tariffs. That is a terrible combination.

The 2018 farm bill does provide essential programs to producers that allow them to mitigate some of the risks—some of the risks—that are outside their control. Many of these programs are implemented through the authority