

Senator BLUMENTHAL will ask for unanimous consent to pass crucial election security legislation. They will talk about what their legislation will do. But know this: Protecting our elections should not be partisan. It should not be controversial. It should earn the unanimous support of every Member.

The very wellspring of our democracy is the principle of free and fair elections. Will our Republican colleagues stand up for free and fair elections today or will they once again block commonsense legislation to defend our democracy?

I yield to the Senator from Virginia.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I thank the Democratic leader.

I am here today because I think, as we all know, our elections remain vulnerable to foreign election interference. Russia attacked our democracy in 2016, with the goal of undermining confidence in our system, a system of free and fair elections—literally, the bedrock of our democracy.

Their cyber attacks and disinformation efforts continue to this day, and our own FBI Director, Christopher Wray, has reassured or, potentially, warned us that they will be back in full force this year. Not only that, but we will have to contend with potential interference from China, Iran, North Korea, and others who have basically copied the Russia playbook.

The threat is real, it is ongoing, and we are not doing enough to be ready. Time and again we hear these same warnings from our intelligence community leadership, from companies like Facebook, from the special counsel, and many others. The truth is that the alarm bells are going off, and we are running out of time to actually do something about it.

Unfortunately, the White House and the U.S. Senate seem to be the only ones not taking this threat seriously. Since 2016, this body, which we all have the honor to serve in, has failed to vote on a single piece of standalone election security legislation. Three times last year I came to the floor in an attempt to pass bipartisan election security legislation by unanimous consent, and each time these efforts were blocked by some of my Republican colleagues—blocked and actually earned applause from the President on Twitter for their actions.

Well, I am back again today because the security of our elections cannot wait. In a moment, I will ask unanimous consent to pass my legislation known as the FIRE Act. This bill would simply say to all Presidential campaigns going forward that if a foreign power reaches out to your campaign offering assistance or offering dirt on a political opponent, the appropriate response is not to say thank you. The appropriate response is to call the FBI.

I introduced this bipartisan legislation months before the facts came to

light about the President pressuring Ukraine into announcing a politically motivated investigation into the Bidens.

Now, I am not here to rehash the impeachment trial, but I do want to note one thing. A number of my Republican colleagues justified their votes by saying that, while not impeachable, it was wrong for the President to solicit foreign interference in our elections. I take my colleagues at their word that they believe foreign interference has no place in our elections, but if I take you at your word, you have got to put your money where your mouth is. We are under attack from our adversaries, who see this new era of cyber warfare and disinformation as a unique and golden opportunity to undermine American democracy.

We cannot afford to have a system that allows any Presidential candidate to welcome this kind of interference with open arms. If we can't trust the President of the United States and his campaign to do the right thing and report foreign interference, then we need to require it by law.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2242

Mr. President, as in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Rules Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 2242, the FIRE Act; that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; that the bill be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I reserve the right to object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. Mr. President, I would like to articulate the reason for the objection to the legislation brought forward by the minority.

You would think that, after spending weeks in this Chamber litigating the finer points of their disagreements with the President's foreign policy, our friends in the minority would be weary of picking another partisan fight. But here we go again.

They are attempting to bypass this body's Rules Committee on behalf of various bills that will seize control over elections from the States and take it from the States. And where do they want to put it? They want it to rest in the hands of Washington, DC, bureaucrats.

As I have said on this floor before, I served on a local election commission. I know how hard our friends and neighbors and our local election commissions and our State election commissions work to ensure the integrity of the ballot box.

What would these bills that are going to be brought forward this morning do? They would centralize control over the vote, and what we have seen is big centralized out-of-control government. We

would end up having a less safe electoral process. It would be more vulnerable to attack.

It is absolutely baffling to me that the minority would fight so hard for such a disastrous vision, but, as I said, here we go again. Their actions show complete contempt for the progress that Congress, the intelligence community, and State-level authorities have made to protect our elections without resorting to a Federal power grab.

Since fiscal year 2018, Congress has invested \$805 million in protecting the vote. This is the largest investment in elections since the 2002 Help America Vote Act. And do you know what? It is making a difference. It is making a difference.

Why, then, would the minority continue to demand changes that would redirect that investment to support groups like the Iowa Democratic Party, whose mishandling of their own caucus ended in what has been termed by everyone as an unmitigated disaster?

They know it is not necessary, and yet time and again they are trying to force this issue. They feel like only the bureaucrats in Washington, DC, can handle this.

So in response to this gross hypocrisy, today I am filing my own bill directing the Government Accountability Office to look into the debacle in Iowa.

I send a bill to the desk, and I ask that it be appropriately referred.

This is not an attack. This is a recognition that any complex process comes with the risk of mistakes or mismanagement. We are all vulnerable. We must recognize this. We must investigate allegations of fraud and mismanagement, and, of course, there should be lessons learned from the past. To ignore these problems is to resign ourselves to a fatally flawed democratic process.

On that note, I do object to the motion, and I ask my colleagues to remember that we have reached a bipartisan consensus on the importance of securing our elections. We are all against election interference. We are all against foreign interference in elections. We are all for free and fair elections, and we are all for protecting the ballot box.

So I hope my Democratic colleagues do not resort to sending out more fundraising letters saying that the Republicans are opposed to a secure election process, because that is a falsehood. We are not. We are for a fair process. We do not believe federalizing that process and taking the power away from local governments and State governments is the way to do that.

So let's focus on the bipartisan consensus, and let's not throw that away in the name of having another partisan grudge match.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Virginia.

Mr. WARNER. Mr. President, I appreciate my colleague's comments about

State and local election security, which I support.

I see two members of the Senate Intelligence Committee on the floor, and I am extraordinarily proud of the bipartisan, unanimous work that we have done to point out what happened in 2016 and to lay out with a great deal of specificity what we need to do as a nation to protect ourselves in 2020.

This legislation I am proposing today is really kind of the simplest, lowest hanging fruit. I think we all say that we don't want foreigners interfering in our elections. All this legislation says is if a foreign government or foreign agents interfere to try to help or hurt any Presidential candidate, we ought to make sure there is no ambiguity that the appropriate response is not to say thank you but the appropriate response is to call the FBI.

That is the message we have heard from Director Wray. That is the message we have heard from the intelligence community. If we can't agree on that, gracious, where are we?

And, candidly, in other times we might not have needed this kind of legislation. It seems so patently obvious.

I am disappointed with the objection. We will keep trying.

With that, I yield the floor to my colleague from Oregon.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Oregon.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 2238

Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I want to thank the vice chair of the Select Committee on Intelligence and pick up on his remarks.

For my colleagues, I believe they have asked that I give my remarks before I offer my unanimous consent request, and that is what I will do.

Mr. President, America is 266 days away from the 2020 elections, and Majority Leader McCONNELL has yet to take any concrete steps to protect our foreign elections from hacking or foreign interference. Thanks to this legislative blockade, the Senate has been totally derelict in its duty to stop foreign cyber attacks on our election.

I want to give just one concrete example, having listened to my colleague from Tennessee. There is not one single nationwide, mandatory election cyber security standard on the books. That means there is not even a prohibition on voting machines having an open connection to the internet. Colleagues, that is the equivalent of stashing our ballots in the Kremlin. There is no such cyber security prohibition.

The election security debacle of 2016 was 4 years ago, but still this body has refused to act. We know Russian hackers probed all 50 State election systems. They hacked at least one election vendor. Russians penetrated two Florida county election systems, according to Florida's Governor. That is just what we know about.

Despite all the ways foreign hackers have already made it into our election infrastructure, the Congress has re-

fused to arm State and county officials with the knowledge and funding they need to secure their systems.

I will state what I tell my constituents at townhall meetings at home—and I have more of them scheduled this weekend—I believe, as of today, the 2020 election is going to make 2016 look like small potatoes. The list of threats and vulnerabilities ought to be a wake-up call—a wake-up call—for every Member of this Senate. There were the ES&S voting machines that for years came with preinstalled remote-access software. There is the fact that Russia hacked an election vendor called VR Systems in the summer of 2016. VR Systems electronic poll books in North Carolina malfunctioned on election day that year, and one polling place had to shut down for hours. It was 2½ years before the Department of Homeland Security even investigated what had happened, and the government still has not adequately responded to questions I and Senator KLOBUCHAR have asked about this.

Right now, many election officials across the country are buying election systems that they believe in good faith are high tech, but they are in fact vulnerable to hacking and are outdated the moment they come out of the box. There is the alarming trend of states using mobile voting apps, like Voatz, that haven't been vetted by top security experts.

This is the reason why so many cyber security experts have been sounding the alarms for years, warning that putting computers between a voter and their ballots is a prescription for disaster. What happens when a “glitch” changes a candidate's vote totals by just 2 percent or 5 percent instead of 50 percent? What happens when a glitch shuts down machines in some precincts and not others, disenfranchising voters and skewing election results?

Five States still exclusively use hackable, paperless voting machines, and nine other States still use paperless machines in some counties.

These are serious problems, but there are some clear solutions. I proposed a bill called the PAVE Act, which has three key priorities that are universally supported by people who are knowledgeable in the election security field: paper ballots, routine post-election risk-limiting audits, and mandatory Federal cyber security standards for election systems.

Last year, the House passed a major election security bill called the SAFE Act, which included most of the PAVE Act. Senator KLOBUCHAR and I, on behalf of colleagues on this side of the aisle, introduced the Senate version of the SAFE Act. The SAFE Act has all three key elements recommended by our Nation's top cyber security experts—paper ballots, security standards, and postelection audits—as well as the funding necessary to make sure States can live up to the new standards.

The SAFE Act, in my view, represents the most comprehensive com-

monsense defense against foreign election hacking. I strongly urge my colleagues to reconsider their opposition to this vitally important legislation.

Mr. President, as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Rules and Administration Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 2238, the SAFE Act; that the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; that the bill be considered read a third time and passed; and that the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

The Senator from Tennessee.

Mrs. BLACKBURN. I object.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Objection is heard.

The Senator from Oregon.

Mr. WYDEN. Just to give a brief response, I think it is unfortunate that my colleague is not even willing to engage in this discussion with respect to this.

I just want my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to think about their claims. They are saying, for example, that, well, they are sympathetic to the idea that there should be more money for election officials. The recent appropriations funding doesn't even have a requirement that it be spent on election security. States can buy brand new, insecure paperless voting machines that are pretty much useless when they come out of the box. They can even use the money to buy office chairs or a water cooler for the election office.

Again, I come back, and I hope my colleague from Tennessee will reflect on this because she is somebody who has spent a lot of time on technology issues.

The idea that this Senate is willing to say “You know, we are not even going to do something. We are not even going to act” when you can have voting machines with an open connection to the internet—it is just like stashing our ballots in the Kremlin. Something really is out of whack, and we ought to be coming together and passing the SAFE Act. We at least ought to be talking about it. What we have is a specific, documented case for an important piece of legislation, and the majority just says: That is the way it is. We are happy to say that you can have voting machines with an open connection to the internet. We are not even going to talk about it.

I think it is very unfortunate.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

UNANIMOUS CONSENT REQUEST—S. 1247

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, as if in legislative session, I ask unanimous consent that the Rules and Administration Committee be discharged from further consideration of S. 1247 and the Senate proceed to its immediate consideration; that the bill be considered read a third time and