America’s integrity as a global superpower and our own national security depend on the health of our democracy. Yet, today, our democratic system is increasingly paralyzed. There are many factors driving this paralysis. The undue influence of money in politics is among the most alarming. As more and more money flows into elections every year from entrenched special interests, the American people’s trust in our governmental institutions weakens.

This is occurring at a time when the dark forces of terrorism and authoritarianism are casting longer and longer shadows across the globe. Now more than ever, America needs to be an unblinking beacon of democracy. If America is going to continue being that famous shining city upon a hill, we must put our own house in order.

**Too much fundraising, too little defense policy expertise**

Congress has the authority to declare war and maintains the power of the purse, ultimately selecting which military and diplomatic projects to fund and at what levels. These are critically important responsibilities. Yet one recent poll found that half of Americans had little or no confidence in Congress to protect U.S. national security.

One reason Congress may seem so ill-prepared is the overwhelming amount of time far too many lawmakers spend raising money for their reelection campaigns and their political parties. Constant fundraising undermines Congress’s ability to evaluate the problems facing our country. Valuable time — for some lawmakers, up to 30 hours a week — and energy get diverted away from critical decisions concerning national security issues. Elected officials need the freedom to lead, from holding enough robust hearings about pressing defense issues to forging working relationships with their counterparts across the aisle. That’s how to ensure the country will be able to successfully tackle national security issues when they inevitably arise.

Moreover, fundraising prowess all too often trumps other qualifications when it comes to appointing ambassadors to powerful positions across the globe. Democratic and Republican presidents alike have long doled out plum ambassadorships — such as those in Western Europe, home to many of our most-critical allies — to top campaign fundraisers. President Richard Nixon once said donors needed to pony up at least $250,000 — about $1.5 million in today’s dollars — to be considered for an ambassadorship, and he even asserted that “some posts require wealthy people.” Meanwhile, a hotel magnate and Democratic Party fundraiser nominated by President Barack Obama to be the U.S. ambassador to Norway had to withdraw after displaying deep ignorance about the country during his Senate confirmation hearing. Our country cannot afford a government where the chase for campaign cash compromises its capacity to make sound national security policy decisions.
The nation’s budget is bloated with funding for outdated weapon systems, redundant facilities and over-priced contracts. Reducing the undue influence of special interests will help the United States make smarter, more strategic decisions about its weapon systems and better steward taxpayer money.
DEMOCRACY = NATIONAL SECURITY

Combatting foreign influence

Democrats, Republicans and independents agree that American voters should decide American elections. This unites people across the political spectrum, as the public knows foreign agents have no allegiance to any particular U.S. political party and could work to hinder both Democratic and Republican candidates.

While Russian government-linked interference has been at the forefront of discussions about foreign meddling in the 2016 election, there is now broad, bipartisan concern that other adversaries — such as China, Iran, North Korea or radical jihadists — could use similar tactics in the future.

The American intelligence community concluded that Russian sources used American social media platforms to sow division and discord during the 2016 election. Fake accounts on Facebook and Twitter, for instance, were used to spread disinformation and propaganda, often exploiting hot-button social issues, with the goal of shaping opinions of real Americans. In some instances, Russian “trolls” urged people to attend protests. In one case in Texas, they even successfully encouraged protesters associated with both sides of the issue to show up.

Furthermore, some of the foreign interference came in the form of paid online advertising to increase the reach of these messages. The recently introduced bipartisan, bicameral Honest Ads Act is designed to bring more transparency to digital ads and prevent foreign actors from anonymously attacking and undermining our sovereign elections.

Conclusion

Put simply: Our country’s national security is being weakened by the dysfunction of our democracy. America is only as strong on the global stage as we are at home. It is vital that we take meaningful steps to improve America’s political system so we can better protect our interests at home and abroad.

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