

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.



**“ Strengthening our democracy strengthens our national security.”**

-Chuck Hagel, former secretary of Defense, senator (R-NE) and member of Issue One's ReFormers Caucus

## Undue influence of special interest lobbies

Moneyed interests too often push Congress to spend taxpayer money on weapon systems that are not the best choices for the national defense — and sometimes not even desired by the Pentagon. One way they attempt to cement their relationships with key lawmakers is through campaign contributions. They also spend millions of dollars on lobbying, with the potential to make billions in return on government contracts.

Moreover, defense contractors frequently engage in what the Committee for Economic Development of The Conference Board calls “tactical subcontracting,” in which the construction of equipment is spread across the country in a manner so that “the largest possible number of members of Congress would find their constituencies adversely affected” if questions are raised about the program. In doing so, these defense companies create jobs in a multitude of congressional districts and frequently contribute sizeable amounts of campaign cash to the politicians in those areas.

For instance:

- ▶ **F-35 Joint Strike Fighter**  
The F-35 Joint Strike Fighter is the most expensive military weapon system in history, with a price tag that exceeds \$400 billion. Significantly over budget and behind schedule, the project has been accused of being “too big to fail.” Lockheed Martin, which manufactures the F-35, boasts on its website that it “teams with more than 1,400 domestic suppliers in 46 states and Puerto Rico” to produce the aircraft.
- ▶ **M-1 Abrams tank**  
The M-1 Abrams tank is manufactured by General Dynamics, which argues the vehicle “provides a proven, unrivaled and decisive edge in combat.” In production since 1980, thousands of tanks are now idle, parked in rows in a storage depot in the California desert. Yet Congress has repeatedly funded the program over objections from the Department of Defense throughout much of the past decade.



**“ Across the globe, more people live under authoritarian governments than democracies. The United States needs to set an example, but right now we’re not. To do so again we must adopt much-needed reforms to increase the American people’s confidence in government.”**

-Porter Goss, former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, congressman (R-FL) and member of Issue One’s ReFormers Caucus

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.

## 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.



**“ The health of our political system is a national security issue. We must rally citizens from all sides of the political spectrum to strengthen the system that has enabled us to take a position of global leadership.**

-Lee Hamilton, former congressman (D-IN), vice chairman of the 9/11 Commission and member of Issue One’s ReFormers Caucus