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NATIONAL SECURITY

STEERING AND POLICY COMMITTEE

Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

July 24, 2019

President Donald Trump
1600 Pennsylvania Ave. NW
Washington, D.C. 20006

Dear President Trump,

We are writing to express our concern regarding the lack of White House leadership on a matter of great national security: the integrity of our nation's elections. Foreign interference in our elections undermines the system of government the framers designed to ensure our representatives are elected and act according to the will of the people. The Executive Branch you lead has a responsibility to safeguard that system. Although individual agencies are working to do their part to prevent another attack on our elections - by all accounts - you are not.¹

On October 7, 2016, the Department of Homeland Security and the Office of National Intelligence issued a statement declaring that the Intelligence Community is "confident that the Russian Government directed the recent compromises of emails from the US persons and institutions, including from US political organizations."² On January 6, 2017, US intelligence agencies confirmed that "Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered an influence campaign in 2016 aimed at the US presidential election" and Russian intelligence attempted to breach multiple state or local election boards.³

Indeed, in February 2018, a grand jury empaneled by Special Counsel Mueller indicted 13 Russians and three companies for stealing the identity of US citizens engaged in activism designed

¹ See Eric Schmitt, "In Push for 2020 Election Security, Top Official Was Warned: Don't Tell Trump," *The New York Times* (April 24, 2019), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/24/us/politics/russia-2020-election-trump.html>.

² Press Release, US Department of Homeland Security, Joint Statement from the Department of Homeland Security and Office of National Intelligence on Election Security (Oct. 7 .2016), available at <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2016/10/07/joint-statement-department-homeland-security-and-office-director-national>.

³ Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent U.S. Elections*, ICA 2017-01D (Jan. 6, 2017), https://www.dni.gov/files/documents/ICA_2017_01.pdf (describing the Kremlin's activities as "a significant escalation in the directness, level of activity, and scope of effort compared to previous operations").

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to sow discord and undermine confidence in US elections.⁴ Later that year, Special Counsel Mueller secured indictments for 12 members of the GRU, Russia's military intelligence agency, for hacking the Democratic National Committee and the Clinton Presidential Campaign.⁵ And the *Report on the Investigation Into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election* (the Mueller Report) detailed the sophisticated efforts the Russians undertook to interfere with the administration of elections.⁶ Moreover, for the past two-and-a-half years, Intelligence Community officials across your Administration have issued repeated, urgent warnings to Congress that foreign actors will continue their efforts to interfere in our elections.

Congress must have confidence that the administration is taking this ongoing threat seriously, and that the full capabilities of the Federal government are being brought to bear in a deliberate, coordinated fashion led by the White House. Members of both the House of Representatives and the Senate have received briefings from top administration officials on this important issue, and have seen no evidence of strong White House interest or coordination.

On July 10, top officials from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Department of Homeland Security, and the National Security Agency/U.S. Cyber Command briefed Members of the House on their efforts to defend the 2020 elections from foreign interference. When asked who at the White House was leading and coordinating interagency efforts to protect the 2020 elections from foreign interference, none of the briefers were immediately able to provide an answer. Moreover, it appeared that you have not received a recent joint-briefing from the Federal agencies responsible for election security. None of the briefers could confirm that you have ever received a comprehensive election security briefing in advance of the 2020 Election. This, coupled with your reluctance to acknowledge Russia's election interference in 2016 and the cavalier manner in which you joke about election meddling,⁷ suggests election security is not a priority for you.

The apparent unwillingness of your White House to take election security seriously is not new. You have questioned the conclusions of our Intelligence Community related to Russia's interference in the 2016 Presidential election since January 6, 2017. Despite demands from Congress, you never identified an individual responsible for coordinating election security efforts

⁴ Matt Apuzzo & Sharon LaFraniere, "13 Russians Indicted as Mueller Reveals Effort to Aid Trump Campaign," *The New York Times* (Feb. 16, 2018), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/16/us/politics/russians-indicted-mueller-election-interference.html>.

⁵ Mark Mazzetti & Kate Benner, "12 Russian Agents Indicted in Mueller Investigation," *The New York Times* (July 13, 2018), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/13/us/politics/mueller-indictment-russian-intelligence-hacking.html>.

⁶ Special Counsel Robert S. Mueller, III *Report on the Investigation Into Russian Interference in the 2016 Presidential Election*, 50-51 (May 2019).

⁷ See Peter Baker & Michael Crowley, "Trump and Putin Share Joke about Election Meddling, Sparking New Furor," *The New York Times* (June 28, 2019), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/28/us/politics/trump-putin-election.html> ("Turning to Mr. Putin, he said, with a half-grin on his face and mock seriousness in his voice, 'Don't meddle in the election, President.' As Mr. Putin smiled and tittered, Mr. Trump pointed at another Russian official in a playful way and repeated, 'Don't meddle in the election.'"); Peter Baker, "Trump Says 'I'd Take It' if Russia Against Offered Dirt on Opponent," *The New York Times* (June 12, 2019), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/12/us/politics/trump-russia-fbi.html?module=inline> (responding "'They have information — I think I'd take it'" when asked if he would accept information about a political opponent from Russia).

in advance of the 2018 elections. Since the beginning of the year, you have praised Senators for blocking election security measures, joked with the Russian President about election meddling, and suggested you would accept derogatory information from a foreign adversary about a political opponent and not tell the Federal Bureau of Investigation. And in April, reports emerged that your acting chief of staff barred the former Secretary of Homeland Security from raising concerns about election security with you.⁸ Those reports not only make clear that you are not engaged in the election security discussion, but also raise questions about what other national security issues the acting chief of staff is keeping out of the Oval Office.

To the best of our knowledge, you have not designated any individual at the White House to coordinate interagency efforts to defend our elections against foreign interference, nor have you requested or received a recent joint briefing from the officials leading election security efforts across the Federal government. If this is accurate, it is deeply troubling and suggests a total disregard of a proven threat to our national security and our democratic system of government.

We write to officially request confirmation that you designate an individual to coordinate a whole of government effort to secure our elections and that you receive an in-depth briefing from the Intelligence Community on Russian interference – and any other foreign interference - in our 2020 election. It is imperative that you respond appropriately to contain the influence that Russia and other malign foreign actors are attempting to exert on our elections.

It is your responsibility, as Commander in Chief, to address the threat of cyber-attacks, influence operations, disinformation campaigns, and other activities that undermine the security and integrity of U.S. democratic institutions. We implore you to treat this issue with seriousness and with the utmost sense of urgency and concern that it demands.

Sincerely,



BENNIE G. THOMPSON
Member of Congress



DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ
Member of Congress

⁸ Eric Schmitt, et. al, "In Push for 2020 Election Security, Top Official Was Warned: Don't Tell Trump," *The New York Times* (April 24, 2019), available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/24/us/politics/russia-2020-election-trump.html>.