



VICE CHAIR ELLEN L. WEINTRAUB
FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20463

STATEMENT OF VICE CHAIR ELLEN L. WEINTRAUB
ON THE LATEST FAILURE OF THE FEDERAL ELECTION COMMISSION TO
PROTECT AMERICAN ELECTIONS FROM FOREIGN INFLUENCE

May 24, 2018

Today, the Federal Election Commission (FEC) has again let the American people down at the very moment when the country needs this agency the most.

The 2018 midterm general elections are six months away. Both Republicans and Democrats recognize that there is overwhelming evidence that our elections were and continue to be under foreign attack. Just last week, Sen. Richard Burr, the Republican chair of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence stated that “[t]here is no doubt that Russia undertook an unprecedented effort to interfere with our 2016 elections.” His Democratic colleague, Sen. Mark Warner, added: “one thing is already abundantly clear – we have to do a better job in the future if we want to protect our elections from foreign interference.”

In February of this year, Special Counsel Robert Mueller indicted 13 Russians and three Russian entities for engaging in a wide-ranging, multi-million dollar conspiracy to “interfere with U.S. political and electoral processes, including the 2016 U.S. presidential election.” Also in February, Director of National Intelligence Dan Coats told the Senate intelligence panel: “There should be no doubt that Russia perceives its past efforts as successful and views the 2018 U.S. midterm elections as a potential target.”

So what is America’s election agency going to do to better protect those elections? According to the FEC’s Republican commissioners today: *Nothing*. My Republican colleagues continue to block the FEC from acting to protect our 2018 midterms. I proposed today that the agency launch an expedited rulemaking that would harden the defenses of the U.S. campaign finance system against foreign influence. At the very least, we must make it harder for foreign nationals to use shell corporations to disguise their spending on our elections. We should also prevent foreign governments like Russia and China from using companies they own with U.S.-based subsidiaries to influence our elections. My colleagues said no to both of these proposals.

I have been sounding the alarm since 2011, but since 2016, everyone should have heard the klaxons. I have written and spoken out on this issue, convened a forum on Corporate Political Spending and Foreign Influence, and introduced multiple rulemaking proposals.

Each time in response, my Republican colleagues have said to the American public — with the proverbial straight face — that they would be willing act if only there were enough evidence to justify doing so. Enough evidence? The Director of National Intelligence is satisfied that the Russians are targeting the 2018 midterm elections, but my colleagues on the Commission are not? At this point, I frankly don’t think they would be satisfied by anything short of an FEC expenditure report personally signed by Vladimir Putin.

If the Commission waits for every investigation into Russia's interference in the 2016 election to close before taking preventive action, as my colleagues propose, we'll still be debating this in 2020, and we'll be lucky to get rules in place for the 2022 or 2024 elections to address what happened in 2016. By that time, of course, those outside this country who are seeking ever more ingenious ways to deploy their money to influence our elections will have devised new strategies to undermine our democratic institutions.

We know — *right now* — that Russia illegally spent millions to influence the 2016 elections. We know — *right now* — that they and perhaps other countries are targeting this year's elections. And we are in a position — *right now* — to do something about it. With increasing volumes of dark money being spent, we would be naïve to think that those who do not have this nation's best interests at heart won't seek out every loophole to exploit.

The time for excuses and delays is over. The time for us to act is long overdue.