

September 20, 2017

We strongly believe that our country's national security is being weakened by the dysfunction of our democracy. We are Republicans and Democrats who have served in Congress, governors' offices, presidential cabinets, federal agencies, the 9/11 Commission and the military. We know that America is only as strong on the global stage as we are at home.

Yet, today, our democratic system is increasingly paralyzed. The dominance of money in both politics and policymaking has created a crisis. Many members of Congress, both Democrats and Republicans, reach across the aisle to try to do the right thing, working hard to promote the country's interests. However, far too many members of Congress spend too much time "dialing for dollars" and not enough time attending to legislative responsibilities. Leadership roles on powerful congressional committees are awarded based on fundraising ability, not merit or expertise. Access to the legislative process is often granted to the biggest political donors, while average Americans feel as if their needs are unaddressed. And secretive "outside money" groups can hijack elections. All of these factors exacerbate partisan gridlock, and weaken the ability of members of Congress to engage in thoughtful deliberation and oversight.

This is not the way our great Republic was designed. When the Founders wrote the treasured words, "Establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty," Congress was placed at the heart of power because of its deliberative nature, including its ability to compromise. When it comes to national security, Congress has the authority to declare war and control the power of the purse, ultimately selecting which military endeavors to support and which projects to fund.

Yet, as Defense Secretary James Mattis recently told the House Armed Services Committee, Congress has "sidelined itself from its active constitutional oversight role" and "met the present challenge with lassitude, not leadership." Such lassitude must be replaced by tenacity and courage. This is a volatile moment in history when the dark forces of terrorism and authoritarianism are gaining greater footholds across the globe, and people are questioning whether democracy is the most effective form of governing.

America must light the path forward toward a renewal of faith in democracy, but we must put our own house in order to do so. That's why, out of a deep respect for what the

Founders began more than 240 years ago, we urge lawmakers of both parties to urgently redevelop the spirit of bipartisanship and change the relationship between money and politics. Doing so will reaffirm the principles of self-government that have both made America the envy of the world and preserved our safety along the way.

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