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**Wisconsin 7th Congressional District Candidate Margaret Engebretson's Statement on Threats to American Democracy**

Thank you all for coming today.

In January 2017, our Intelligence Community released an unclassified report “Assessing Russian Activities and Intentions in Recent US Elections”. Since it was about our 2016 election, I read that report as soon as it was posted. It was immediately clear to me that our nation was facing a serious threat to our democratic republic. This was an active measures campaign that attacked our private correspondence, our voting systems, and poisoned our political discourse. Because I was recovering from surgery at the time, I was able to monitor the response of our leaders in Washington. I expected that, in the face of this threat, our nation’s leaders would rally the public, our government agencies, and private industry to a common defense of our democracy.

This coordinated response did not occur. I realized that, for the first time in our nation’s history, we could not count on the majority of our current elected leaders to rally us in this most serious of times. I felt an overwhelming sense of duty to step forward and take concrete action to defend our democracy. I went online shortly thereafter and found where to attend my county’s next Democratic Party meeting. I joined that cold January evening and became a member of a political party for the first time in my life. While I still identify as an American first, I recognized that only by unseating those in Congress who are unable or unwilling to act, will we save our democracy. This is what sparked the journey that would lead me to run for Wisconsin’s 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District seat.

This past week several events happened in rapid succession that have demonstrated that the fears I first experienced in January of 2017 were well founded. We saw the Special Counsel’s Office release the detailed indictments of 12 Russian intelligence agents for cyberattacks on American political organizations and individuals, and the subsequent weaponization of the stolen data to sow discord. These indictments further demonstrated in minute detail that there was a massive coordinated attack on our democratic system by the Russian government.

This coordinated attack is ongoing. Just this week, Director of National Intelligence, Dan Coats, told us that the warning lights are blinking red - that (in his words) “the digital infrastructure that serves this country is literally under attack.”



We also witnessed our President, the Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces of the United States, hold a joint press conference with Russian president Vladimir Putin, in Helsinki. The demeanor of President Trump was nothing short of servile, while he denigrated American intelligence agencies, previous American leaders, and the American people. And, to make matters worse, he once again denied the very existence of the Russian government's attack on our democratic political system.

In a constitutional republic like ours, where we have built in checks and balances between the three branches of government, if one of our branches is derelict in its duty and a threat to the security of the United States, it is vital that the other two branches swing into action to stabilize the republic. What has caused me the most alarm is that the Republican majorities in Congress – especially in the House of Representatives – are actively undermining our ability to defend ourselves. They should be investigating the Russian government's attack on our democracy and taking steps to counter that attack and shore up our defenses. Instead, they have consistently minimized the threat we are facing, confused the relevant facts to the American public, and have sought to sabotage the Special Counsel's probe led by Robert Mueller.

Right here in Wisconsin's 7th Congressional District, we have a federal representative, Sean Duffy, who has used his position as a member of the House of Representatives to systematically undermine the Mueller investigation – the very investigation that is serving as one of our most important lines of national defense. From the time that Mr. Duffy was a member of Trump's transition team, he has acted either wittingly or unwittingly to undermine a unified national response to the attack on our democratic republic. He has referred to the Mueller probe as a "charade" and "sham," and after President Trump's fawning performance in Helsinki, he issued a statement minimizing the Russian government's interference in our elections and expressing skepticism about the entire Mueller investigation.

We face a national security crisis that requires all of us, every American as Americans, to unite in the common defense of our democracy. This is an all-hands-on-deck moment.

There are three steps that Congress should take immediately:

First, enact legislation to protect the Mueller probe from any Presidential interference or subversion.

Second, establish a 9-11 style commission to develop a coordinated national strategy to defend our democracy.



And third, secure our voting systems by providing increased funds to states to assist with election security. I cannot overstate the importance of this final point. If citizens cannot trust the accuracy of our elections results, they may come to doubt the very legitimacy of our government. This would be catastrophic for this country.

Tragically, the current majority in Congress has proven itself unwilling to take the necessary steps to defend our democracy. Just this week, for instance, the House Republicans killed an effort to provide additional funding to states for election security.

This leads me to the most important step that we, as Americans, must take. When, in a time of national crisis our leaders fail to act and uphold their oaths of office, it is up to us, the people, to take the lead. The people of this country must unite. All of us, regardless of party, must unite in defense of our democracy and demand that our government take action. If our leaders once again fail to act, we the people must replace them with elected officials who will always put country over party. It is very simple - If you are a member of Congress and you do not take the safety and security of our democracy seriously, you have no business being in office. Yes, I'm talking about Sean Duffy.

I served my country in the military for 24 years. It is no accident that I re-enlisted multiple times. The oath I swore when I first enlisted I intend to keep until the day I die. I have always felt a deep sense of duty to this country and am committed to defending our democracy. All of us play a vital role. The bottom line is this. It is not only our military or our intelligence services that defend our nation. Our fundamental line of defense is an active and engaged citizenry. In this time of national crisis, it is up to each of us to do what we can to defend our democracy. Unite!

More information at [www.vetfordemocracy.com](http://www.vetfordemocracy.com)

**Media contact:**

Greg Leaf  
[greg@groupleaf.com](mailto:greg@groupleaf.com)  
651-271-2511