

Medal of Freedom Presentation Ceremony Prepared Remarks

Thank you very much, Mr. President, for this tremendous honor. I accept this award on behalf of the people of California's San Joaquin Valley who sent me here to Washington. And I'd like to thank all the people in this room—both Intelligence Committee staff and Members of Congress—each of whom played an instrumental role in the work leading to this recognition. I'd particularly like to thank my wife Elizabeth and my daughters Evelyn, Julia, and Margaret, who've endured a lot over the past four years.

In order for a democratic republic to survive, people who disagree about policies and politics need to have full confidence in the fairness of the system—all sides must believe that in processes such as judicial proceedings, law enforcement actions, and the conduct of elections, all people will be treated equally and the outcomes will be honest. Without this underlying trust, a democratic republic simply cannot continue.

During the Russian collusion investigation run by House Intelligence Committee Republicans, we unearthed extensive corruption by a nexus of intelligence officials, political operatives, and unscrupulous media companies, who jointly launched an information warfare operation against a democratically elected president. In their attack, these figures abused our intelligence systems, trampled the rights of American citizens, lied to a court, and withheld vital evidence both from Congress and from the judiciary.

Although much of the truth about these matters eventually got out, the malfeasance was so vast that millions of Americans have lost faith in the fundamental fairness of our vital institutions. I believe these institutions' primary responsibility now is to fully acknowledge their problems and win back the trust they have squandered.

In April 2019 the Department of Justice published Special Counsel Robert Mueller's report, which failed to find any evidence that the Trump campaign colluded with Russians to hack the 2016 elections. It's already easy to forget the years-long daily drumbeat of so-called bombshell stories issued by the nation's top media outlets—including Pulitzer Prize winning reports—alleging some terrible act of treason by Trump campaign associates.

The fake narrative was like a tsunami that washed away all other news topics, any hints of skepticism, and even common sense.

Ultimately, the whole project imploded so spectacularly that by late 2019 unprincipled Members of Congress, working with the same corrupt media figures and political operatives, had to scramble to invent a new pretext for impeachment, since the collusion hoax had become unsustainable for what had been its primary purpose.

It was stunning to watch—for years—Members of Congress and veteran reporters celebrate the blatant manipulation of intelligence, the unmasking of political opponents in intelligence reports, the presentation of false evidence to a court, the FBI's embrace of concocted opposition research, and the enthusiastic use of classic McCarthyite smears and character assassinations.

As it turns out, the malfeasance was committed not by Trump associates, but by Mueller's own team. They should have been investigating themselves.

The collusion hoax was inherently preposterous, filled with bizarre fantasies of conspiratorial meetings in exotic locations, ludicrous blackmail material, and interceptions of treasonous communications. Despite the lack of evidence, the media eagerly propelled this hoax, which was simply an opposition research project financed by political campaign operatives.

In my view, there is no recovery for the media. They transformed into the propaganda wing of one political party, and once they did that, it became impossible for them to be trusted by anyone aside from the narrow band of partisans they chose to serve. The vast majority of their content is now overseen by billionaire oligarchs who have political agendas tied to their own financial interests.

I should note, however, that if Americans can see past the fake media narratives and overcome the censorship of Silicon Valley tech bosses, they'll find a small group of real reporters who continue to produce legitimate news.

The corruption of our media, Intelligence Community, and law enforcement agencies is an urgent problem. We lend these institutions our trust to wield unique influence and authorities. In return, they must exercise these powers responsibly for the good of the nation.

The Russia collusion hoax has severely eroded that trust. To this day, the perpetrators of the hoax have not come clean about their malfeasance. The weaponization of America's critical institutions as a tool of partisan warfare is an extremely dangerous development that is utterly incompatible with our nation's continuance as a democratic republic.

Mr. President, I'd like to take a brief moment to pay special recognition to my former staff director Damon Nelson, who passed away in the midst of this affair. Damon's contribution to our investigation was invaluable, and I'm glad his widow, Air Force General Dana Nelson, could be here today, since this is Damon's award as much as it is mine.

In closing, Mr. President, I'd like to thank you for this incredible honor. I believe we are a long way from seeing accountability on these issues and seeing the criminals face justice. But House Intelligence Committee Republicans will continue our work to get all the facts and expose the full truth to the American people.