

TribTalk

Time for a Texas-style sanction against Russia

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The Russian regime has been accused of sowing distrust in America's democratic institutions and meddling in our elections. In addition, the country has a troubling record of stifling liberty. On my recent seven-day trip to Russia, my hosts were polite, but unconvincing when I confronted them with tough questions on these allegations.

Upon arriving, our American delegation — led by U.S. Sen. Rand Paul and the president of the CATO Institute — immediately began conversations with Russian counterparts about how we might grow together as allies, averting the current course as geopolitical foes.

I am a firm believer in the power of face-to-face conversations, even with antagonists. Millions of Texans are concerned about the security of our elections and Russia's efforts to undermine our democratic institutions. These discussions provided an opportunity to speak truth to power, to relay Texans' concerns, and to directly address Russia's anti-liberty record. Maintaining a healthy skepticism, I asked the Russian officials and economic leaders several tough questions. I managed to extract an important concession from Konstantin Kosachev, a prominent legislator who leads the foreign relations committee of Russia's upper house: Russia election interference “will certainly not happen during the ongoing election campaign,” he said, at my request. Nonetheless, the answers were not always forthright, and we must “trust, but verify.” Unfortunately, I do not trust them, as evidenced by new reports of meddling even since my return to Texas.

Thankfully, our federal government has committed to a decisive effort to defend our nation from foreign influence. In an [August 2, 2018 letter](#), National Security Advisor John Bolton summarized recent steps the U.S. government is taking to defend our election systems against meddling and interference — regardless of the source. Earlier this year, Congress allocated \$380 million to be distributed to the states for election security upgrades. Data from the federal Election Assistance Commission indicates that states will spend approximately \$134.2 million of that total on cybersecurity upgrades, and another \$102.6 million on voting machines. This is also good news; albeit it's a starting point, not a “mission accomplished” moment.

My staunch opposition to non-citizens voting in our elections (which is confirmed by [several sources](#), including the Dallas County Elections Administrator Toni Pippins-Poole), is just as strong as my opposition to Russia's meddling. I am committed to safeguarding election integrity, transparency and voter security in whatever form they take.

Leaving Russia, where it is far too dangerous to criticize or investigate President Putin's regime, I was also struck by how we take our liberty for granted in America. The foundation of American exceptionalism (and Texas exceptionalism) is the simple truth that our liberty comes from God, not the government.

In addition to election tampering, I'm deeply concerned by Russia's aggression against the news media and those who dare to oppose the Putin regime. The freedom of speech and the press are bedrocks of our U.S. Constitution, which I swore an oath to protect and uphold.

I remain solution oriented, and in developing solutions, I'm operating on the premise that Texas is — and should remain — a major player on the world stage. It's time for Russia and the entire world to wake up to the realization that Texas is an international economic powerhouse. For example, Texas just reached the historic milestone of exporting more oil than it imports. If we were a nation (again), Texas' economy would be the 10th largest in the world, outpacing Russia by \$400 billion.

In light of Texas' international economic clout, and the Russians' continued meddling in our elections, I'm going to push for state-level sanctions. Texas has previously engaged in such action when necessary to protect its interests by enacting sanctions against Sudan and Iran and by blocking official state investments in companies that boycott or divest from our close ally, Israel. A similar state-level sanction against Russia is warranted, and I'll introduce one in the 2019 legislative session. A Texas-style sanction against the Russian economy will be noticed, and it will be persuasive.

As someone who stands for free and fair elections, and for the liberty of every Texan, I'm troubled by what I saw and learned in Russia, and by what I continue to see today. My message to the Russian officials was: "Don't mess with Texas elections!" Now, I'm planning to enforce that mantra.