It’s astoundingly rare for foundation leaders to make statements about national political issues, but yesterday, through the Democracy Fund, leaders of 42 major philanthropic organizations across the United States joined together to publicly call for the protection of the independence of the special counsel investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. Here, in full, is the statement they made:

“As leaders of nonpartisan American philanthropic institutions, we care deeply about the long-term health of our republic, our two-party system, and our democratic institutions. Together, we want to express our deep concern about the resignation of the Attorney General, which came at the request of the president, and the appointment of an Acting Attorney General who has openly criticized the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 election — an investigation he reportedly will now supervise. Led by Special Counsel Robert Mueller, this independent investigation is integral to understanding not just what happened in 2016, but also who was responsible and how to prevent further interference in our political system in the future.

“We believe it is essential that the independence of the special counsel investigation be preserved. We ask that other civic, business, and government leaders join us in standing up for the rule of law—a cornerstone of American democracy. John Adams is often quoted as describing a republic as “a government of laws, not of men.” Adherence to the rule of law preserves our democratic values and the rights of individuals; it maintains order, and it protects against arbitrary government action. It also ensures the independence and integrity of our governmental institutions, including our law enforcement agencies. Those in
power cannot and should not use or manipulate law enforcement for their own personal protection or for political gain. Rather, these agencies must apply the law impartially in the pursuit of justice. In the United States of America, the rule of law is paramount.

“Any action taken by a president that could interfere with the supervision of a legitimate law enforcement investigation into the activities of his campaign, his business interests, or those who serve in his administration, threatens these bedrock norms. This is especially true when such an investigation includes the specter of foreign interference in American elections. No one is above the law, including the president, his family, and others who serve in his administration. The special counsel’s investigation must be allowed to continue unimpeded.

“We stand together in our commitment to the protection of our democracy and its freedoms, for which generations of Americans have fought and given their lives.”

The press release and list of signatories can be accessed here. Signatories include Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation; Pamela Shifman of the NoVo Foundation; Patrick Gaspard of the Open Society Foundations; and Stephen Heintz of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund.