

this meeting is fraught with peril. My primary concern is that the President, in his penchant for spur-of-the-moment decision making, could lead the United States into danger in one of two ways.

My first concern is that the President, without a clear or coherent strategy, will buy a pile of magic beans, accepting an agreement—any agreement—that allows him to declare victory. We know what he will say: the greatest compromise ever, greater than Versailles, greater than anything. Talking is good, but it is very far from an agreement to disarm.

President Trump should not accept a deal that doesn't include concrete steps to verifiably roll back North Korea's nuclear and missile programs, including those that threaten our allies and partners. So that is one concern: that the President accepts any agreement because he is just so eager to tout that he was a great deal maker and made an agreement, even if it is a rotten agreement for America.

My second concern is sort of the opposite. My second concern is that the President, without a disciplined or coherent strategy, will walk away from a bilateral meeting if he doesn't get everything he wants. There is also the possibility that the President will walk away from an agreement after the fact if he decides later he is unhappy with it. We have seen him do that on so many occasions. As someone who has negotiated deals with the President, I know it is a very real possibility.

Now, some may say that these are opposite possibilities. They are, in a certain sense. If he takes too little, he walks away because he didn't get everything. But they are all underlined by one coherent fact: There is no strategy—at least apparent to just about everyone.

The President seems to operate on a whim, saying one thing one day and another thing the next. When there is no coherent strategy, each of these dangers is too real. Either scenario could leave relations with a rogue state worse and more dangerous than before.

Now, the President said last night at Mar-a-Lago that he would leave a meeting with Kim Jong Un if it wasn't fruitful.

Mr. President, this is not like a business deal. There is a very real danger to walking away from a meeting with a nuclear-armed dictator. It could risk serious escalation. If the United States is seen as the one walking away from talks, we should be under no illusions that China, Russia, and others will not follow suit.

We all want to see negotiations with North Korea succeed. If it is true that North Korea will take its demand for U.S. troops to leave the Korean Peninsula off the table, that is a good step. Our commitment to the Korean people and our alliances with Korea and Japan are not subject to negotiation. But, I repeat, if these talks are going to truly succeed, the President and his team require a coordinated strategy, some-

thing this administration hasn't been able to show with respect to Russia, Syria, Yemen, the Middle East, and other hotspots around the world.

#### SPECIAL COUNSEL LEGISLATION

Mr. SCHUMER. Madam President, on another topic, I have come to the floor several times over the past month to document the number of ways in which this administration has signaled a willingness—perhaps a desire—to interfere with Special Counsel Mueller's probe into Russian interference in the 2016 elections.

Beyond troubling statements from the White House Press Secretary and the President's allies in the media, President Trump himself has publicly mused about the firing of the special counsel. So while I appreciate that the majority leader believes the President would be wrong to fire the special counsel, I believe it is a real mistake not to pass legislation to protect the investigation. I sincerely hope Leader MCCONNELL reconsiders his refusal to entertain bringing such a bill to the floor. It is a bipartisan bill.

I have talked to Members on both sides of the aisle who are worried about a constitutional crisis. We all know the consequence of Presidential interference in the Russian probe and how dire it would be for the rule of law, fundamental to our democracy, and the constitutional crisis that it would create should be avoided at all costs. Unfortunately, there is substantial evidence that the President has thought about firing the special counsel more than once in the past and may well do so in the future.

The bipartisan legislation introduced by Senators GRAHAM, COONS, TILLIS, and BOOKER has no real downsides to it. It would simply provide a legal avenue to restore the special counsel if existing DOJ regulations are breached and he is fired for political reasons.

So what is the reason not to do it? Why not head off a constitutional crisis at the pass rather than waiting until it is too late? The rule of law is fundamental to the functioning of our democracy. Why even flirt with the prospect of a President challenging the very nature of our system of government?

So I would urge my friend Leader MCCONNELL to think twice about this—to think not simply about his responsibilities to his party and not simply about doing what the President might want, but to our country and our Constitution. If we think of it in those terms, I think it is inevitable that we would want to pass this legislation. That is because the rule of law is fundamental to the functioning of our democracy. Why even flirt with the prospect of a President challenging the very nature of our system of governance and rules?

So I hope the Judiciary Committee moves forward with the bipartisan bill. I hope there is no attempt to water it

down or to create a back channel for political interference in ongoing investigations. It is clear that several Republicans, including Chairman GRASSLEY, Senator TILLIS, Senator GRAHAM, and others, see a need to pass this legislation. Let them prevail upon the Republican leader to reconsider his position.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

#### CONCLUSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Morning business is closed.

#### EXECUTIVE SESSION

#### EXECUTIVE CALENDAR

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, the Senate will proceed to executive session and resume consideration of the following nomination, which the clerk will report.

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the nomination of JAMES BRIDENSTINE, of Oklahoma, to be Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Senator from Florida is recognized.

#### PUERTO RICO BLACKOUT

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, it is hard to believe, but the entire island of Puerto Rico yesterday descended into darkness. An excavation happened to hit a main line that cut out the electricity of the entire island—3½ million people—an island that is not a small island; it is a large island. It was a total blackout. Now, 24 hours later, a large number of the people on the island are still in the dark.

Tomorrow marks 7 months since Hurricane Maria made landfall in Puerto Rico, and yet Puerto Ricans are still dealing with constant setbacks and unreliable power. This is simply unacceptable.

Senator RUBIO and I have asked the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Committee to conduct an additional oversight hearing on the overall hurricane recovery and get to the bottom of this. I understand this

hearing will likely take place next month.

In the meantime, this is a widespread power outage. It is the latest example of why so many people who were forced to leave the island after the storm haven't been able to return home, even though they want to. Yet, despite all the island's ongoing troubles, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, FEMA, said this week it is going to terminate the transitional shelter assistance for more than 1,600 families across the United States, and 600 of them are in my State of Florida. It doesn't make sense. For too many of these displaced families, the only thing keeping a roof over their head right now is the FEMA program, and it is transitional housing assistance. What that means is, they are either in hotels or motels and, in some cases, apartments, where FEMA is providing them temporary shelter because they have been displaced from their homes; in this case, the island of Puerto Rico.

Storms like Hurricane Maria did this to the island of Puerto Rico. We have a responsibility to provide them with all the assistance we can. Senator RUBIO and I sent a letter to the FEMA Administrator and to Governor Rossello, the Governor of Puerto Rico, urging them to work together to extend this vital program. At the very least, because there are so many of these families who have children in school, to extend it to the end of the school year so the family doesn't have to be uprooted while their child is still in school.

I am happy to report that Governor Rossello has made that formal request to FEMA. The deadline is tomorrow. Hopefully, FEMA is listening to the Governor and to the pleas of Senator RUBIO and me as well because students and families have had endless disruptions and need some semblance of stability so they can finish out the year.

The hard fact is this. The situation in Puerto Rico is far from over. These are our fellow U.S. American citizens, and they desperately need our help. We should be providing them with all the help we can.

Mr. President, I want to speak on another topic.

(The remarks of Senator NELSON pertaining to the introduction of S. 2720 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. NELSON. I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. RUBIO. Madam President, we are on the nomination of Congressman BRIDENSTINE to be the new Administrator at NASA. I want to tie it into

what I will talk about in a moment because it comes down to Presidential appointments and the problems we are running into with regard to them.

I was not enthused by the nomination. It is nothing personal against Mr. BRIDENSTINE. I feel that NASA is an organization that needs to be led by a space professional. Unfortunately, a few weeks ago, the Acting Administrator resigned—or, I should say, retired. His last day on the job is the 30th. So it leaves us with the prospect of this incredibly important agency for Florida and the country with a vacancy in its top job. We are on our second Acting Administrator. If one were to do the math, even if Congressman BRIDENSTINE were to withdraw and a new vetting process were to begin for a new nominee, by the time it would work its way through the administration, the committee process, and the floor, the way things are going here, we could be into February-March, at the earliest, of next year. There is no way NASA can go 2 years and X number of months without having a permanent Administrator.

One makes these decisions always under the context that a President should have significant discretion in picking the team. Whether you like it or not, millions of Americans last year voted for the President. He was elected, and he has a right to govern. In 4 years—in less than 4 years now, in 2½ years—the American people will have the chance, once again, through our democratic process, to opine on whether or not they will want him to have a second term. Our job here is to provide advice and consent. We are to analyze these nominees and determine whether or not we want to support them.

My view of it is, as has been the tradition of the Senate for the entire existence of the Republic, that we give great deference to the President on choosing the qualifications. We want to make sure that people are qualified and that there is nothing about them that would disqualify them. It is my view that the more important the job the more discretion the President deserves. It is why, although I had significant reservations about the nomination of Secretary Tillerson, I decided to support it, because I believed the President deserved significant discretion. When you get to the subsecretaries and the like, I think that discretion diminishes.

It is what has led me to decide to support Congressman BRIDENSTINE, despite my reservations, and it is what, I hope, will lead my colleagues—at least a sufficient number—to support the nomination of Mike Pompeo to be the Secretary of State.

Let me read you some of the previous votes we have had here in the Senate. All but one of them predates my service.

Colin Powell was confirmed by a voice vote, which is almost unimaginable in a 21st century Senate, but in 2001, on January 20, by a unanimous

voice vote, he was confirmed as the Secretary of State.

A few years later, in 2005, Condoleezza Rice was confirmed as Secretary of State by a vote of 85 to 13. Now, it was still 13 noes, but, nonetheless, it was 85 yeases. I assure you that not everyone who voted for her was happy about her nomination. People didn't necessarily agree with her. One of the people who supported her, I believe, was future President Barack Obama.

Hillary Clinton was nominated and confirmed in the Senate by a vote of 94 to 2, and I promise you that a significant number of the Members on my side of the aisle may have respected Secretary Clinton but strongly disagreed with her and her views on a number of issues, but, nonetheless, they felt the President deserved to have his nominee.

When she resigned, her replacement was then-Senator Kerry, who was the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, with whom I had significant policy disagreements in the Senate and during his time as Secretary of State. Yet I, along with 93 other Members of the Senate, supported his nomination, and he was confirmed.

#### NOMINATION OF MIKE POMPEO

Madam President, we now have the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency—a man who is clearly qualified. He is a graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, a person who has served this country in uniform, who has served his country in Congress, who has been successful in the private sector, and who has served as the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency.

We have learned over the last couple of days that the President has significant trust in him, so much so that he was willing to send him privately to begin setting the stage for, perhaps, the most important short-term diplomatic engagement this country will have with North Korea. By the way, one of the most important things you want in a Secretary of State is for the President to have confidence in him. You have to have someone who, when he goes abroad and meets with people, the people know he has the President's ear and speaks for the administration. Mike Pompeo clearly has that. Yet we face the prospect of significant opposition to the point at which there are questions about whether it will pass in the committee. Although, I think it will pass on the floor.

I hope people will recalibrate their thinking. I don't think you have to agree with Mike Pompeo. You most certainly don't have to feel that he is the person you would have picked had you been President. You need to recognize that you are not the President, and none of us here are the President. The President deserves to have a team of people whom he trusts and can work with and who are qualified. I do not believe anyone could argue that Mike Pompeo is not qualified. He is certainly as qualified—in fact, I would argue

more qualified—as the person whom he would replace in terms of experience in his field. I hope people understand that and are willing to be a little bit flexible about this.

I understand the interest groups are ginning up. Listen, we have the same thing on our side of the aisle. In full disclosure and candor, when President Obama was the President, there were interest groups on the right of center who constantly pressured Congress to oppose everything, not just legislation but also nominees. I assure you that I did not get a lot of love mail when I decided to support Senator Kerry at the time. But it was the right thing to do because he was clearly qualified, and that is who the President wanted. I hope that that is what we will do in this case in confirming Mike Pompeo, because this Nation faces some very significant challenges in foreign policy that need to be immediately addressed, and we simply cannot do that without a Secretary of State.

For me, that became quite apparent this weekend. I happened to travel to Lima, Peru, for the Summit of the Americas. The Vice President attended on the President's behalf because of the situation in Syria, and the Deputy Secretary of State, Mr. SULLIVAN, was there and did a good job, but there is no replacement for a Secretary of State. We had no Secretary of State at the summit. The key issue—one that, I think, Director Pompeo, if confirmed as Secretary, could help with—is the situation in Venezuela.

#### VENEZUELA

Madam President, I understand that the headlines are dominated by events in the Middle East and by the geopolitical and economic and trade conflict between the United States and China, but I do want to take a moment to talk about something that I have been speaking about on the floor of the Senate for the better part of 4½ years. It is one that I know that Director Pompeo knows well, as we have talked about it extensively, and that is the growing catastrophe that is Venezuela.

To begin, I want to say clearly that we should care about it simply because that catastrophe has become a threat to the United States and to the region.

What do I mean by that?

First, the regime in control, Nicolas Maduro's, is a state sponsor of drug trafficking. It is very simple. What I mean by that is this: Drug trafficking networks enjoy the protection of the Venezuelan Government. In fact, one of the concessions—literally, one of the contracts—that the Maduro regime gives its cronies and loyalists is drug trafficking networks.

A drug trafficker who wants to move coca out through Colombia, into Venezuela, and then into the Caribbean or Europe will find the right general or the right individual in the Maduro government, and that individual will ensure that his plane is not shot down and that, in fact, the military and the government organisms of the Govern-

ment of Venezuela—of the Government of Maduro—protect him, facilitate him. The people who are supposed to be stopping him are helping him. It is a racket. It resembles organized crime. That is what Maduro does.

We have seen an incredible surge in coca production in Colombia to historic levels over the last couple of years, and it is headed here, to a nation that is already struggling with an opioid crisis. We are about to be flooded with cheap cocaine once again, and a significant amount of it will be trafficked into this country with the aid, the assistance, and the support of the dictator in Venezuela. That is a threat to the United States and to the region.

No. 2, he is a threat to the United States and to the region because he has triggered a migratory crisis that is destabilizing all of Venezuela's neighbors, primarily Colombia, which each day is absorbing tens of thousands of people fleeing starvation and rampant disease, unlike anything we have ever seen, absent a natural disaster in this hemisphere. It is destabilizing countries that are already struggling.

Colombia is already struggling to try to deal with drug trafficking groups that are, in many parts of that country, more powerful than the government in some areas and the demobilization of the FARC and another terrorist group called the ELN. We have invested, along with our Colombian partners, millions and millions of American taxpayer dollars to help Colombia, which, just a decade and a half ago, was on the verge of being a failed state. We helped them to succeed. They are among our best allies in the world and, certainly, if not our best, one of the best, top-of-the-list allies in the Western Hemisphere. They are being destabilized because they are absorbing tens of thousands of migrants a day who are fleeing not just political oppression but starvation.

Healthcare experts are telling us that children in Venezuela will not fully develop physically to their full potential because they are malnourished today. Infants, newborns are dying in cribs and in hospitals because of a lack of medicine and because of a lack of food. These are images that we are used to seeing in other parts of the world, and it breaks our hearts when it happens somewhere else. This is happening in our hemisphere, and it is all man-made in one of the richest countries in the hemisphere—the most oil-rich country on the planet that just a few years ago was one of the most prosperous economies in the entire region.

People are starving, and they are starving because of a man-made crisis. The Maduro regime uses food as a weapon. No. 1, one of the other concessions it gives the cronies around Maduro is that if they are loyalists, he puts them in charge of food distribution. What does that mean? That means you can siphon the food into the black market where you can make an exorbitant profit. You obviously are

going to take some for yourself so that your family gets to eat.

Then they have the sick process where, in order for you to get food from the government, you have to show up with your government-issued ID in Venezuela. They know who the government supporters are, and they know who isn't. They know who turns out to vote, and they know who doesn't. It is a fraudulent election, by the way, because ultimately they will manipulate it as they have done before. So imagine that they know you didn't vote for them. They know how you voted because they monitor the machines. If you support the government, you get food, and if you don't, you don't get food. That is why he doesn't want food coming in.

The third is that we are engaged in what, I believe, is global competition or a battle between authoritarianism and democracy. There is a rise in the threat of authoritarianism in Turkey, in the Philippines, obviously in China and Russia, and in this hemisphere it is Venezuela. Venezuela is openly attacking the regional democratic order. They have basically canceled their Constitution. They have tried to replace the democratically elected national assembly. They have removed the legitimate judiciary branch and replaced it with loyalists of their own.

Fourth, there is a growing body of evidence that the Maduro regime provides a platform for the enemies of the security of the United States, including Russia and Hezbollah.

The spillover effects are undermining our efforts and the efforts of our regional partners to promote democracy, human rights, and stability in our own backyard in our hemisphere. That was apparent last week at the Summit of the Americas, where a growing number of countries—Argentina, Brazil, Peru—are making incredible strides and continue to build upon the democratic structures they have in place. The Peruvian President recently had to resign after a previous President resigned because the rule of law is working. In Brazil, it is the same thing. They are going to have elections this year in Mexico, in Brazil, in Colombia. These will be legitimate elections. They may elect someone who agrees with us 50 percent of the time, and they may elect someone who agrees with us 90 percent of the time, but they will elect someone. Yet, in stark contrast to that, is basically a coup d'état that has occurred in Venezuela, where a small group of people have canceled the democratic order or at least they have tried to.

In all of this, there is great news; that is, for the first time in recent memory, the democracies of the region have come together to act on this. It began with the so-called Lima Group, which is a collection of countries that make up the overwhelming majority of the economic power and the population size of the hemisphere. They have long banded together to criticize the democratic order. We are not even officially

a member of it, but they have been supportive of the moves made by this administration to target Maduro.

Well, last week at the summit, all the members of the Lima Group, plus two—the Bahamas and the Government of the United States—issued a joint statement rejecting the sham Presidential vote on May 20 in favor of free elections and strongly urging the Venezuelan dictatorship to release all political prisoners. The problem, as I met with members of civil society and the legitimate elected representatives in the National Assembly of Venezuela, is that we have reached an inflection point now. Statements, letters, communiqués are fine, but the time to act is now because people are dying. They are starving to death. The humanitarian crisis alone compels us to take action.

The question posed to me is: Well, what can we do? Some of the traditional ideas that people roll out there are additional sanctions. Sure, but there is more that can be done, and I want to quickly highlight what I hope will be the three things that happen.

The first is—well, let's decide first on a forum. The ideal forum to deal with this is a multilateral organization created specifically for the purpose of defending democracy in the Western hemisphere. That is called the Organization of American States. It is a group of 34 nations, and it was designed to deal exactly with this. Sadly, there is a small—and I mean a very small minority—of some of the smallest countries in the OAS, particularly in the Caribbean, that frankly have been bribed and/or compromised from voting against the Maduro regime because either they continue to receive cheap oil in dwindling amounts or their leaders in this government or the previous one basically stole the money and the oil, and now the Venezuelans know it, and they are going to release it publicly if these guys break from them. A small number of these countries representing less than 10 or 15 percent—maybe even less than 10 percent—of the population of the region have banded together to prevent the OAS from expelling Venezuela, a dictatorship, from the OAS, an organization of democracies. I don't think we should give up on the OAS. We should continue to try for the OAS to be the forum for the plan I am about to outline. But if that doesn't work, then there has to be an alternative, and the alternative should be the Lima Group, plus at least one—the United States. What I hope will happen is that the Lima Group will meet before or shortly after the May election and that it will be a meeting of Treasury Ministers, Foreign Ministers or both, which is why we need a Secretary of State to be there, to chart a regional approach on a way forward to Venezuela.

Here is what I believe that regional approach should be. No. 1 is that we must collectively announce that we are going to continue to increase in a mul-

tilateral way the pressure on the Maduro regime, and the way we should do that is by coordinating these national-level sanctions that target criminal elements of the Maduro regime—target these drug traffickers, target the people who are trafficking in the food and controlling the food distribution for their own purposes, target the shell companies they are using to make money, store their money, and hide their money. If all of these nations did that, encompassing the U.S. financial sector—the Brazilian, the Colombian, the Panamanian banking sectors, which will be critical in this—it would provide increasing pressure on that regime and on Maduro's loyalists to break. The goal is to maximize the pain felt by these corrupt, oppressive, and illegitimate government officials.

The second thing we need to do is address the humanitarian crisis, which is spiraling out of control. As I have said already, three to four million Venezuelans have fled their country to escape starvation, deprivation, violence. Neighboring states are bearing disproportional burdens, and they need help in doing so. I think we need to continue to provide that assistance.

Ultimately, the answer to Venezuela's future is not outside of Venezuela, but it is inside of it. That is why it is my hope that the priority of this new group—the Lima Group, plus at least one, the United States—would be to open up a humanitarian corridor that allows food and medicine to go inside Venezuela, and it can be distributed by a nongovernmental organization. Put the Catholic Church in charge or the Red Cross. It can't be the Maduro government; they will steal it. In fact, they will not even allow it. The Maduro regime will not allow humanitarian aid to come in because, one, they would lose the leverage of using food and medicine against their people and, two, they would have to acknowledge they have a crisis. We must do all we can to force that avenue to open so that we can deliver food and medicine to the people who are dying and starving. They are dying of simple diseases for a lack of basic medicine.

It is critical to let the people of Venezuela know that food, medicine, and international aid are ready to be delivered to their country by putting up pictures of the trucks and the warehouses showing that all of this food and all of these medicines are ready to come in, and the only thing standing in the way is the corrupt, evil government that today has empowered itself in their nation.

The third thing we need to be doing as part of this plan is preparing to help rebuild a free and democratic Venezuela after Maduro leaves power. The third goal I hope this gathering will reach is a consensus and an agreement that we will set up the equivalent of a Marshall Plan for Venezuela that includes investment from the Inter-American Development Bank and significant contributions from the United

States and our partners to help rebuild the disaster and the catastrophe that the Maduro regime will leave behind.

We also need to help empower legitimate institutions. When we talk about the Venezuelan opposition, what we need to understand is that these are not rebels in a mountain; these are the National Assembly elected by their people. It would be as if a parallel Senate were created and we were no longer paid salaries, had staff, often no longer allowed to meet, and our laws were no longer given the force of law. That is what has happened, but the National Assembly is there. We need to support them. We need to make clear they are the legitimate representatives of the Venezuelan people—the only leaders in that government today, along with some of the Governors who were legitimately elected under the Venezuelan Constitution. They are having a problem, by the way. When they show up at our Embassy in Venezuela, they are being denied visas to travel abroad. At a minimum, we should be granting them visas to travel abroad, recognizing them as fellow Parliamentarians who have a right to speak on behalf of the people of Venezuela.

The other thing we need to do is cooperate with the real equivalent of a Supreme Court—many of whom are now in exile but who continue to meet. That is their credible and legitimate judicial system, and we should be cooperating with them and helping them. They have all sorts of information about corruption that implicates Venezuelan activities in the United States.

I will close with this. The dictatorship in Venezuela knows and the people who surround Nicholas Maduro know they are on borrowed time. It is our obligation to expedite that, not through a military intervention, not through simple unilateral sanctions—which I support, and we are prepared to continue to do—but ideally through an international, multinational, regional effort in which the United States is a partner with our allies in the region. We should continue to pressure the regime with sanctions, to deliver humanitarian aid inside and outside of Venezuela, and to create the mechanisms to rebuild that country's institutions and its economy. This is an opportunity for regional leadership.

At a time when democracy and authoritarianism are in conflict all over the world, this is an opportunity to deliver a decisive blow to authoritarianism in our hemisphere. It cannot happen with America alone, but it cannot happen without American leadership. This is the plan I hope we will pursue. This is the method I hope we will use, but to do it we need a strong leader at the Department of State to be a catalyst for all of this. This is why I urge my colleagues to rally and support doing something about Venezuela, and one of the best ways we can do that right now is to confirm Mike Pompeo as the next Secretary of State.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SULLIVAN). The Senator from Hawaii.

Mr. SCHATZ. Mr. President, NASA is a science agency. Its mission is to advance science, technology, aeronautics, and space exploration and enhance knowledge, education, innovation, economic vitality, and stewardship of the mission. That is the mission. That is why past NASA Administrators have been accomplished leaders in the fields of government, aviation, and science.

The NASA Administrator in President Obama's administration was Charles Bolden. He has a master of science degree. He was an astronaut and commanding general in the U.S. Air Force. President George W. Bush had two Administrators during his Presidency. Michael Griffin was a physicist and aerospace engineer who helped to design missile defense technology satellites early in his career. Sean O'Keefe was an engineer in the Navy who worked on nuclear submarines. Before leading NASA, he served as Deputy Director of OMB, Secretary of the Navy, and Comptroller for the Department of Defense. Daniel Golden was a mechanical engineer who previously had been a vice president at a space and technology company. He was nominated by President George H.W. Bush and also served under Presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. Richard Truly served as vice admiral in the Navy before he became the first former astronaut to head the space agency under George H.W. Bush.

The reason we are having a robust debate about Mr. JAMES BRIDENSTINE to lead NASA is that this is the first time in history we have someone without similar qualifications to run such an important agency.

JIM BRIDENSTINE, the nominee we are considering, served as a Navy pilot, and I thank him for his service, but that does not qualify him to run NASA. Just because you know how to fly a plane does not mean you have the skills and experience to lead the Federal Government's space agency.

I am not alone in that opinion. A NASA consultant wrote that Mr. BRIDENSTINE does not have "significant knowledge and experience with how NASA works" or "deep technical knowledge in aerospace systems."

There are a lot of things a NASA Administrator has to do. Most of it is governed by law, and I expect anybody who is confirmed will follow the law, but the most solemn and serious responsibility that the NASA Administrator has is final launch authority. A launch is a culmination of work by thousands of people over many years. If something goes wrong, we could lose a payload that is worth millions of dollars or is, in fact, irreplaceable. People could die. That is why this job requires someone with good judgment and an understanding of all of the elements that go into a space launch. That is why we have always had NASA administrators who have demonstrable exper-

tise in these fields. It is downright dangerous to have someone without this expertise with this kind of authority. Frankly, it is even more frightening to have a leader who has made a career out of ignoring scientific expertise.

JAMES BRIDENSTINE is a climate denier with no scientific background who has made a career out of ignoring science. Now I also don't have a scientific background, but I defer to scientists. I rely on the scientific consensus, and the scientific consensus is not what Mr. BRIDENSTINE says, which is that it is sort of difficult to tell how much climate change is attributable to human activity. The scientific consensus is that climate change is caused primarily by human activity, and JIM BRIDENSTINE doesn't say that is true, and that is terrifying. Forget our views for the moment about what kind of energy picture we think America should pursue. This is about whether you are going to rely upon people who actually know things or you are going to rely upon your own politics and ideology. When you have final launch authority, you better rely on science.

During his confirmation hearing, Mr. BRIDENSTINE testified that he did not know about the scientific consensus on climate change. He suggested there were other contributing factors that played more of a role, but the fact is this. Almost every climate scientist—97 percent of all climate scientists, to be exact—have concluded that humans are the primary cause of climate change. So there are two explanations for his answer. Either Mr. BRIDENSTINE has not bothered to read up on the scientific consensus on the most pressing scientific issue of our generation or he does not agree with that scientific consensus. Either explanation makes him unqualified to run NASA.

I want to end by reading a few quotes from one of my Republican colleagues. My colleague said that NASA is "the one federal mission which has largely been free of politics, and it's at a critical juncture in its history." He also said any NASA Administrator would need to have the "respect of the people who work there from a leadership and even a scientific perspective." He also said Mr. BRIDENSTINE would add to the politicization of NASA and that NASA, at this critical stage in its history, can't afford that.

I agree with my Republican colleague. I urge every Member of the Senate to give NASA the leader it needs and to vote no on this confirmation.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Utah.

Mr. LEE. Mr. President, later today this body will vote to confirm my friend JIM BRIDENSTINE to be the next NASA Administrator. In that position, he will be in charge of rebuilding a space program that reflects the pioneering spirit and determination of the American people. I have known Congressman BRIDENSTINE for a long time,

and I know he is just the man for this really important undertaking.

Let us review his record. The record shows that JIM BRIDENSTINE's service to our country is matched only by his eagerness to press the boundaries of sky and space.

JIM BRIDENSTINE is a veteran Navy pilot who flew combat missions in Iraq and in Afghanistan. He logged 1,900 flight hours over his 9 years of Active service, and he is still a Lieutenant Commander in the U.S. Navy Reserve.

Following his military service, JIM BRIDENSTINE worked as the executive director of the Tulsa Air and Space Museum. He even owned a team in the ambitious but short-lived Rocket Racing League.

Since his first term in Congress 6 years ago, Congressman BRIDENSTINE has served on the House Science, Space, and Technology Committee. From that position, he has been a thoughtful leader on American space policy as it relates to national security, commerce, and weather forecasting.

The name of his latest bill on these subjects speaks to JIM BRIDENSTINE's ambitious vision for the future: the American Space Renaissance Act. If ever there were a need for a renaissance in space, it is now because who can deny that ever since Neil Armstrong's fateful "one small step" in 1969, America has, in some respects, been retreating from space?

Just 12 years separates the start of the space race from man's first footfall on the Moon. It has been almost 50 years since then, and it is unclear that we could go back to the Moon if we wanted to in a short period of time. As Vice President PENCE pointed out recently, we have not sent an American beyond low-Earth orbit in 45 years.

In a humiliating reversal of sorts, America now relies on Russia to carry our astronauts to the International Space Station because we shuttered our own shuttle space program in 2011. In other words, after America won the space race and after America won the Cold War in one fell swoop, we gave away the distinction of manned space flight to the second-place finisher.

NASA's decline and disrepair is a great tragedy, but it is not all I see when I survey the horizon, and I know this is true of Congressman BRIDENSTINE as well. I see no reason why America, in all of her ingenuity and might, cannot be the dominant leader in space once again. Indeed, I see plenty of areas where this transformation is already underway.

In government, President Trump has signaled his commitment to American leadership in space by relaunching the National Space Council, which met for the first time last fall. Outside of government, private enterprise is pressing the boundaries of commercial space flight every single day. In the deserts of Utah, innovators like ATK are pioneering the next generation of rocket engines and space superiority capabilities. Just yesterday, the world watched

in awe as a SpaceX rocket flung a planet-hunting NASA satellite into orbit. Its mission complete, the rocket booster piloted itself back to Earth for reuse, landing nimbly on a drone ship floating out in the Atlantic Ocean.

Achievements such as these prove that Americans are still awed, still starstruck, by space exploration and all the opportunities it provides.

A new era of leaders can restore this sense of ambition in government. In the halls outside this Chamber, the Senate has a constant reminder of the importance of the space program. I refer to the commemorative mural this body commissioned in the wake of the Challenger disaster.

The mural depicts the crew looking expectantly, hopefully, off into the future. Behind them is the shuttle that carried them to Heaven, and the world is in their hands.

The Challenger Seven gave their lives in order to advance America's space program. They knew the risks—greater practically than those associated with any other profession on Earth or beyond it—but they also knew the mission was worth it because it contributed significantly to their Nation and to all mankind.

What will it say about us if we fail to carry on the mission they undertook, if instead of exploring the infinite frontier, we remain here below, passing the torch of exploration to some other power? I don't want to contemplate that future, and I don't want to believe the American people do either.

Claiming our right to a place in the stars will require an effort spanning many years and several Presidential administrations. We can begin that undertaking today by confirming a leader with a remarkable record of service to our country, a vision for the American space program that is big not small, and a genuine faith in his country that is as boundless as the heavens. That man is JIM BRIDENSTINE. Let's confirm him. Let's confirm him today.

I urge my colleagues to confirm JIM BRIDENSTINE without obstruction, without delay.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Tennessee.

#### NOMINATION OF MIKE POMPEO

Mr. CORKER. Mr. President, thank you for acknowledging me and letting me speak on behalf of our nominee to be Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo.

I did not know Mike Pompeo well. As a matter of fact, I am not sure I ever met him until he was nominated. I just want to say to the people in this body, I don't think anybody would view me as an apologist in any way for the administration, and I view Mike Pompeo as a highly qualified nominee. I spent a lot of time with him privately and on the phone. He did, I thought, an excellent job in his hearing.

We have had a tradition of confirming people to important positions. Just to give a little history, John Kerry was confirmed as Secretary of State by Republicans and Democrats

by a vote of 94 to 3. Obviously, John Kerry, my friend, no doubt, had been involved in partisan activities. He ran for President. He is someone, no doubt, who I am sure has said things people did not agree with.

Secretary Clinton was confirmed as Secretary of State by a vote of 94 to 2—no doubt, the same case. I am sure she said things many Republicans disagreed with when she was a political person as a U.S. Senator running for President.

Condoleezza Rice was confirmed to be Secretary of State in a vote of 85 to 13, and Colin Powell was unanimously confirmed as Secretary of State. So we have had a history of the last Secretaries of State to be overwhelmingly confirmed.

I realize we are in an atmosphere now where that is just not going to be the case. I realize that my Democratic friends in many cases feel that in supporting Pompeo, it is a proxy for support of the Trump administration policies, which many of them abhor. I understand that. There will be a few Democrats who I believe will support him.

I want to say to people in this room, our President has very entrepreneurial tendencies. He talks to people on the phone late at night. He comes in in the morning sometimes with differing points of view than he had the day before. We had evidence of that recently on Syria, where one day, we are going to leave Syria, and the next day, General Mattis and others intervened, and thankfully we are going to stay there and complete the work we are doing against ISIS.

I would argue to people here that we need to have someone like Mike Pompeo, who serves the Nation so well.

This is a person, by the way, who graduated first in his class at the U.S. Military Academy, West Point, in 1986. He served as a cavalry officer patrolling the Iron Curtain before the fall of the Berlin Wall. He also served with the 2nd Squadron, 7th Cavalry, in the U.S. Army's 4th Infantry Division. After leaving Active Duty, Mr. Pompeo graduated from Harvard Law School, having been editor of the Harvard Law Review.

Sometimes we meet people in life who are just sharper than we are, who have had an incredible academic background. I can't even imagine having accomplished some of the things he has accomplished in life.

I know the Presiding Officer served, thankfully. We appreciate that he served in our military. People who have served in the military typically have more respect for diplomacy than those who have not because they understand that their diplomatic effort, if successful, is the thing that keeps our men and women out of harm's way. They know that. Pompeo is committed to that. He was there at the Iron Curtain and understood what diplomacy did to free people and keep conflict from occurring. I know he is highly committed to that.

We have had cultural issues at the State Department, there is no question. I think everyone understands that. Our former Secretary of State is someone with whom I had a good relationship. No doubt there were some things that were left undone at the State Department. We have a lot of positions that are unfilled. All I can say is that I know our nominee is highly committed to promptly filling those positions. We have some culture issues there as a result. We do, there is no question. We know that. We acknowledge that.

As head of the CIA, every month Mike Pompeo sits down with CIA employees in a casual setting where they call him Mike, and they talk with him about what is going on. He is a person who knows how to build culture. He has done so at the CIA. He understands the importance of the professionals who have committed their lives—just like the Foreign Service officers at the State Department—to the CIA. So we have someone who I know is going to build culture. We have someone who I know is committed to diplomacy.

Let's talk about where we are in the world today. We have crises all over the world. We have issues with North Korea, Syria, Russia, concerns about some of the things China has done, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq. Who in the world can possibly know more currently about where we are than our Director of the CIA? I can't imagine there is a person in Washington who has more current knowledge about threats—the people involved in those threats, the people we can use to help us deal with those threats—than the Director of the CIA. There could be no one here more qualified or more knowledgeable to step in immediately and deal with the kinds of issues we have to deal with around the world.

Look at what has happened in North Korea just recently. We know that the back channels to North Korea have always been through intelligence. We understand that. He was exactly the right person to be there to talk and do the precursor work that needs to be done. Many others need to be involved—Secretary of Energy, Secretary of Defense; many other people, obviously—but Director Pompeo was exactly the right person to go and demonstrate his ability to be dealt with with respect.

I will be leaving this body in 8½ months. It has been the greatest privilege of my life to serve here. As I said to my Republican colleagues yesterday at lunch, I actually think the talent and the caliber of people here in the Senate have risen since I have been here. I think we have the best group of Senators today serving in the Senate that we have had since I have been here. I see a crop of people running for these seats, and I think it may even improve next time.

It pains me to know that my friends on the other side of the aisle know that this is a qualified person, this is a person who has demonstrated incredible



excellence in his life—he served his country. He has been in the private sector. He served in this body; he was a Congressman. Now he has distinguished himself with his service as Director of the CIA. By the way, in this position, I know many of my Democratic friends have lavished praise on him because of his transparency and honesty in dealing with them but also the way he has built an excellent culture there.

We will have a vote on Monday night in the committee. I hope we are able to send him out of committee and to the floor. I hope that the Members on the other side of the aisle who have not yet said how they are going to vote will think about the circumstances we are in today and feel that they can support a highly qualified Secretary of State because they know that having someone like him giving advice to the President, leading diplomacy, making sure the State Department, with the great professionals we have there, is given the ability to do what it does best by leveraging its efforts around the world—I hope that people will think about this and realize that we are much better as a nation having Mike Pompeo as Secretary of State than not having him as Secretary of State and will vote aye on the floor.

I thank the Presiding Officer.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. LANKFORD. Mr. President, I rise today to talk with this body about the NASA Administrator.

Later today, we are going to have a vote that is extremely important for the future of NASA and the future of space exploration, what we are going to do with our satellites, what we are going to do on climate issues, and what we are going to do on weather. All of those are related to NASA.

JIM BRIDENSTINE, who is a friend and who is a fellow Oklahoman, the current Congressman from Tulsa, OK—Oklahoma's 1st District—is the person the President has tapped to say: That is the person I support to be the next NASA Administrator.

He has for months and months and months gone through the process. He has gone through committee hearings and has gotten all kinds of support. The committees he served on in the House of Representatives sent a bipartisan letter with wide majorities to the Senate saying: We have worked with JIM BRIDENSTINE. He is exceptionally knowledgeable about issues on space. He is a great choice.

They sent that letter over from the House to the Senate.

Multiple individuals have written letters in support of JIM BRIDENSTINE, including Sean O'Keefe, who is a former NASA Administrator. Buzz Aldrin also sent an extensive letter in support of JIM BRIDENSTINE and also wrote a pretty remarkable op-ed about JIM BRIDENSTINE, in support for him.

We have had multiple different groups that are space related who have

sent us all kinds of information and endorsements about JIM BRIDENSTINE leading NASA and being the next Administrator.

There has been a lot of support from around the country and from multiple individuals—former NASA Administrators, former astronauts, individuals who have risen up—but I still have people who bump into me and say: I don't know who he is. Well, I get that. He is a Congressman from Tulsa, OK. Let me give just a little bit of background so you will have some perspective on him.

JIM BRIDENSTINE began his naval career flying the E-2C Hawkeye off the USS *Abraham Lincoln*. As a naval aviator, he had 333 carrier-arrested landings. He has had 1,900 flight hours in total. While on Active Duty, he transitioned to the F/A-18 Hornet and flew at the Naval Strike. He flew for TOPGUN. He served in Afghanistan. He served in Iraq. He served in our drug interdiction work in Central and South America, flying there. He has had a pretty remarkable naval career.

He graduated from Rice University, which is no simple thing to do. He graduated with a triple major when he finished at Rice University. He has an MBA from Cornell University. He is extremely smart, and he is extremely engaged.

He has been very attentive to the issues of space. Serving in the House of Representatives, he has made his focus space and research and trying to realign NASA into being mission-focused. Some have said that NASA in some ways has lost its focus of what it exist for. JIM BRIDENSTINE has been very, very passionate in trying to get NASA back on focus with a big vision and a big mission. He has done that with multiple different bills that he has worked through, but he has also done that in trying to articulate to the space community why it is extremely important that we have a good, solid, and functioning NASA in all of its areas of operation.

He has the support of our delegation. He has the support of many in the space industry. He has the support of former NASA Administrators. He has the support of former astronauts. And he should have the support of this body today.

We will vote on him at 1:45. NASA's Acting Administrator is in the process of retiring right now. Not only should JIM be here, but we should not have taken this long to actually get to this spot. It has taken 8 months to get to a vote on a NASA Administrator. Let's get him on this task, and let's get him going. We need him in this spot, and I think he will do a fine job. That is not just my opinion; folks from all over the country have risen up and looked at him clearly and have said he is the right person for the job.

#### NOMINATION OF MIKE POMPEO

Mr. President, I do want to make one additional statement as well. We are in the process of talking about the Secretary of State. It has been very inter-

esting that there has been all this debate about Mike Pompeo.

Mike Pompeo is a friend. He and I came to the House of Representatives together and served in the House beginning in 2011. I got to know him for who he really is.

I have been amazed at the smears in the press and the attacks on his personal character. Every time I read one of those, I think, this is a person who has never met Mike Pompeo.

The best way to evaluate Mike Pompeo is not just on his background—small things like graduating first in his class from West Point, his military service, his time in professional business, his time serving as a House Member, the excellent work he has done over the last year leading our CIA, the cool hand he has been in the middle of the chaos, trying to deal with all of the issues right now in Washington, DC—when you look at him, those are all good marks.

Quite frankly, one of the things I would want to come back to you and say is, meet him. For those of you in this body who doubt, who are willing to read a media story that has taken one thing he said at some point out of context, I would encourage you to meet him and actually have that conversation. You are going to find a fine leader who is dedicated to helping our Nation, who has done it on the battlefield, who has done it as a Representative, who has done it as the Director of the CIA, and who will do an incredible job helping us diplomatically and worldwide in the State Department.

I am looking forward to supporting his nomination—not because I am a Republican and it is a Republican nomination but because he is a quality individual who genuinely wants to help the country and who I think will uphold extremely well the history of diplomacy we have had in the United States.

I yield back.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oklahoma.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, let me wholeheartedly agree with the Senator from Oklahoma on Mike Pompeo, as well as the comments he has made about JIM BRIDENSTINE.

#### ANNIVERSARY OF THE OKLAHOMA CITY BOMBING

I would like to deviate just a little bit, though, and remind people that this is April 19, the anniversary of what could be characterized as the greatest domestic terrorist attack in history. It was in our State of Oklahoma at the Alfred P. Murrah office building, and 168 people were killed—many of those were very close personal friends of mine—and 850 others were wounded. I remember so well being there at the time.

Second Corinthians reminds us not to lose heart in times of struggle and tragedy. Instead, through our inherent strength and selflessness, Oklahomans united together to support our neighbors and rebuild our city—“Oklahoma Standard.”

Today, we remember the victims, thank the first responders, and continue to pray for Oklahoma and the families and friends who lost loved ones.

I agree wholeheartedly with the comments that have been made about JIM BRIDENSTINE. I was on the committee that went through his confirmation. I have never heard so many things. The one thing they all had in common was that none of them knew JIM BRIDENSTINE. My colleague talked about a smear campaign. I have never seen a smear campaign like that. I have never seen so much hatred, and for no reason at all. The two of us know JIM BRIDENSTINE well. In fact, he holds the 1st Congressional District seat in the State of Oklahoma. That was my seat. I held that seat for 8 years. Of course, I have gotten to know him very well since that time, and the things that have been said about him—again, the one thing they have in common is they just don't know him and didn't want to know him.

So we will have an Administrator who I think is going to do a good job.

The best thing I can do now, because I think Senator LANKFORD said it better than I could, is just mention two quotes, one of which is from the 2015 SpaceNews. They named him as one of five space leaders making a difference.

Mention was made of Buzz Aldrin. There is no one who is better known in that community than Buzz Aldrin. So I want to use his statement. This is Buzz Aldrin speaking:

We heartedly support the president's nomination of Mr. Bridenstine as the next NASA administrator, wish him Godspeed during the Senate confirmation process. We encourage you to join us in uniting the space community and our nation behind this nominee so NASA can return to its job of boldly exploring the final frontier.

I couldn't have said it better than that.

So I leave my colleagues with that recommendation from Buzz Aldrin, and I look forward to his confirmation and the vote today.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Minnesota.

#### REMEMBERING PRINCE

Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I come to the Senate floor today to remember a Minnesota icon, and that would be Prince, whom we lost 2 years ago. Prince was a one-of-a-kind artist, fiercely independent, and uniquely talented. I grew up with his music.

For Minnesotans, Prince was our superstar next door. He made "Purple Rain" a household name, First Avenue a landmark, and brought international fame to Minnesota's music scene.

Minnesota loves Prince, and Prince loved Minnesota. He was born in Minneapolis in 1958 and developed an interest in music at an early age. He wrote his first song at just 7 years old and recorded his early demo tapes at Sound 80 Studios in Minneapolis.

With seven Grammy Awards, an Academy Award, and a Golden Globe

Award, he pioneered that "Minneapolis sound," that mix of funk, rock, and pop that emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s and influenced music for decades to come. From Jimmy Jam and Terry Lewis to Janet Jackson and Bruno Mars—even Beyoncé—so many artists have been influenced by Prince's music and his heart.

Over his career, Prince sold more than 100 million records worldwide, released 39 studio albums, had 5 No. 1 billboard hits, and 40 singles in the top 100 songs.

In 2004, Prince was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame the very first year he was eligible. And 6 years later, he received a Black Entertainment Television Lifetime Achievement Award.

Despite all of his success, Prince never stopped calling the State of Minnesota home. He lived in our State, and he never lost the sense that he was a beloved son, neighbor, and Minnesotan.

He wrote songs about Minnesota sports teams, including "Purple and Gold" during the Minnesota Viking's run to the 2010 National Football Conference Championship. When the Minnesota Lynx won their third Women's National Basketball Association Championship, Prince held a concert in their honor.

When Prince passed away on April 21, 2016, he left behind millions of fans and a legacy of music that touched hearts, opened minds, and made people all over the world want to dance. I am proud to honor Prince's life and his achievements as a musician, a composer, an innovator, and a cultural icon, and I am proud to call his home, Minnesota, my home as well.

Prince reminded us all that there's a world waiting for us after this life:

A world of never-ending happiness

You can always see the sun, day or night.

I am sure that is where Prince is today. On Saturday, the anniversary, purple will reign again.

#### ALLOWING SENATORS' YOUNG CHILDREN ON THE SENATE FLOOR

Mr. President, I also rise today to discuss S. Res. 463, a resolution adopted by the Senate yesterday that will allow Senators to bring their infant children to the Senate floor.

Several of my colleagues will be joining me on the floor shortly to discuss the importance of passing this resolution, and I would like to take a moment to thank some of them because without their hard work and support, this resolution would not have been adopted.

Of course, there is Senator DUCKWORTH herself—the person who did all the work in more than one way. This is her second child. She is 50 years old, and she is a pillar of strength. She paved the way for future women Senators who will have children while in office. She may be the first, but she will not be the last.

I would also like to thank Senator DURBIN, her colleague from Illinois, for his work in getting this done. Women

may be leading the charge on making workplaces more family friendly, but there are a lot of men, like Senator DURBIN, who have our backs.

I would like to thank Senator MURRAY, who also worked on this with me—a mom in tennis shoes who has long been a true champion for women.

Finally, thanks to Chairman BLUNT and Leaders SCHUMER and MCCONNELL, who helped ensure that this got to the floor and adopted quickly. Chairman BLUNT and I lead the Rules Committee, and we have worked together well for a very long time. I welcome him back to the committee.

I came to the floor earlier this week to discuss the importance of this historic resolution. It is historic for a number of reasons. First, it is very rare for the Senate to expand floor privileges to new groups of people. In fact, it has been decades since we did that. We have to go back to the late 1970s. In fact, there has not been any expansion of who is allowed on the floor since 1997, when a service dog was allowed. That was a long time ago.

I have had a lot of interesting questions about this, including: Would Senator DUCKWORTH's daughter have to abide by the Senate dress code? She will not. She will not have to wear pants or a skirt. She will not wear a Senate pin because that would be dangerous. She can wear a cap if she wants.

Another question: Well, what happens if one day we have 10 babies on the floor? I actually think it would be quite delightful if we had 10 babies on the floor. I don't think there is any imminent concern that will happen, but I do think it would be exciting if we had 10 new moms and dads.

The other reason this is historic is that Senator DUCKWORTH, of course, was the first U.S. Senator to give birth while in office. More women than ever are running for public office, so it is inevitable in the future that more women Senators will have children while in office, and, of course, this new rule applies to men and women.

I think one of the exciting things about this is that Senator DUCKWORTH was very clear that she didn't want this just to be about her and an exception for her; she thought to the future and saw that we would have more women Senators.

Sticking together means recognizing that we have a lot of work to do outside the Halls of Congress, and the women Senators across party lines have stuck together, but we know this fight doesn't end here. We are just an example for the country, but there are so many bigger things to do.

The truth is, too many American moms are not in positions of power to change the rules, which is why it is so important for those of us who are in positions of power to be champions of change—to be able to look at archaic rules that were in place 100 years ago. By adopting this resolution, we set an example. But if we really want to do



something for the rest of America, we have to pass some work- and family-friendly policies, like paid maternity leave and making it easier for workers to get childcare. Those are the kinds of things that will matter to all of America.

But today we set an example for one mom and one baby, and we look forward to meeting her on the floor.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mrs. FISCHER). The Senator from Michigan.

Mr. PETERS. Madam President, I rise today to express my concern about the nomination of Congressman JIM BRIDENSTINE to be the NASA Administrator. I will oppose his confirmation when the Senate votes this afternoon.

While the nomination is problematic due to Congressman BRIDENSTINE's lack of relevant qualifications and the importance of this position to our Nation, I am deeply concerned about this nomination because it is further evidence of a much deeper problem. I am concerned that this administration does not respect science—especially science in government institutions.

So now let's look at the data.

The Office of Science and Technology Policy, or OSTP, has four positions requiring political appointment, including the Director, who also serves as the President's Chief Science Adviser. The President has made zero—zero—nominations to OSTP and has now taken significantly longer than any other modern President to name a science adviser.

Let's look at how the President's delay compares to past administrations on both sides of the aisle. Presidents Kennedy, Nixon, and Clinton all named a science adviser before they even took office. Presidents Reagan, Carter, and George H.W. Bush all named their science adviser within 4 months of taking office. President George W. Bush waited the longest, but he still chose to pick a physicist to fill the role by June of his first year in the Presidency.

When it comes to prioritizing science in the executive branch, President Trump is not normal. You could say this administration is an outlier or an anomaly. This is the same President who flirted with anti-vaccine conspiracy theories as a candidate and regularly suggested that climate change is a hoax. I am not saying that his lack of a science adviser is causing the President's ill-informed views, but I am saying there is, indeed, a very clear correlation.

It is not just the top science positions that are empty or filled by unqualified nominees either. A talk radio host and a political science professor was nominated to be the Chief Scientist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Political science may be interesting to all of us here in the Senate, but it doesn't have much to do with agricultural science.

Of the 43 nominations the administration has actually made to science-

related positions, almost 60 percent do not have advanced degrees in science or health-related fields.

A White House that does not respect science will hold our Nation back. We have historically been a leader in science, and it has unleashed trillions of dollars of economic growth and created millions of jobs. Investment in research and development has been the seed corn for growth in our country and for its economy.

This administration's blatant disregard for science risks ceding that leadership to our competitors, like China, who are making unprecedented commitments in this area.

I do not believe that the Chinese Government is pouring money into scientific research just out of intellectual curiosity; it is because they know it will be the biggest driver of competitiveness and economic growth in the 21st century.

In addition to strong funding for basic research, we need smart, qualified individuals providing leadership across the American scientific enterprise to make sure this money is being well-spent. We need qualified leaders and scientific experts at OSTP, at NOAA, at NSF, at NIH, and we need them at NASA.

NASA has upward of 18,000 employees, 80,000 contractors, and a budget of \$20 billion. NASA also is in charge of keeping our astronauts safe and inspiring a generation of young minds as we face a significant shortage of STEM professionals.

NASA's research, science, and technology missions need a champion who understands and promotes nuances of the work being done by scientists on their team. In short, NASA needs an Administrator who will be driven by science and not by politics.

Looking at all of the data—from NASA to OSTP to the USDA—I can't help but reach the conclusion that this administration does not prioritize science, and this needs to change.

I urge my colleagues to vote against Mr. BRIDENSTINE's confirmation today.

I also urge the administration to wake up, make science a priority in the White House and across the executive branch, and start nominating respected scientists to the remaining vacant positions.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CORNYN. Madam President, the Senate is expected to vote this afternoon to confirm JIM BRIDENSTINE of Oklahoma to be the Administrator of NASA, or the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. For more than 15 months, our national space

agency has been without permanent leadership. This is far too long, especially considering the incredibly important work that NASA is undertaking on a daily basis.

The agency is currently working with the commercial space industry, for example, to resume launches of American astronauts to the International Space Station, rather than have to rely on the Russians to transport American astronauts into space. Additionally, teams at NASA are developing the Space Launch System, or SLS, and the Orion capsule. These are components of a rocket system that is the most powerful one built since the Saturn V that sent Neil Armstrong to the Moon. It will pave the way, hopefully, to one day landing astronauts on Mars.

Having a permanent Administrator in place is important not just so the agency itself can function but so NASA can have an impact on our entire country. Having appropriate leadership means NASA can continue to benefit Texans who work there, with jobs and opportunities to research, collaborate, and innovate across disciplines.

The Administrator is charged with selecting the Directors of each of the agency's space centers around the country. This, too, is important. One reason is because at the Johnson Space Center in Houston, Dr. Ellen Ochoa, the current director, is stepping down next month, after years of distinguished service. It is critical that we have a competent replacement for her and ensure seamless transition after she leaves. Part of the way we do that is by making sure that this nominee is confirmed today.

We in Texas are, I believe, justifiably proud of the Johnson Space Center. The JSC heads the manned spaceflight program for NASA, which manages the U.S. presence at the International Space Station, among other operations. JSC employs roughly 10,000 people, and virtually all U.S. astronauts pass through it, at one time or another, to receive training. Currently, JSC is involved in developing the Orion capsule, which I spoke of a moment ago. One hundred sixty-nine companies are collaborating with NASA on its launch, creating nearly 800 jobs—not all of them in the Houston region. In fact, in multiple locations around the country, the commercial space industry is growing rapidly. In 2014, the Midland International Air and Space Port became the first federally licensed facility by the FAA for both airline flights and commercial space flights. That is just one of several examples.

Meanwhile, in Washington, we have to continue to do our part supporting U.S. space exploration. Last year, I was proud to have my legislation, called the MANIFEST Act, signed into law as part of the NASA reauthorization, and I hope to collaborate on similar legislation in the future with colleagues.

If we want to keep pushing toward the final frontier, our first step is to

ensure that we have a strong Administrator at the helm, and that is why I intend to vote to support the nomination this afternoon.

FOREIGN INVESTMENT RISK REVIEW  
MODERNIZATION ACT

Madam President, I wish to switch gears to another issue. I have spoken quite a few times recently about U.S. relations with China, both the opportunities and the concerns that we should have. Last week, I held a hearing in the Finance Subcommittee on International Trade, Customs, and Global Competitiveness to examine the challenges that U.S. businesses, manufacturers, and service providers face when they are trying to access the Chinese market.

The President spoke about this issue in his State of the Union when he called for reciprocity. In other words, we expect to be treated as well as we treat Chinese investment in the United States when we and our companies invest in China, but that is not happening.

I have also been spending a lot of time looking at the long-term national security implications that China poses to our country, which is why I was proud to join our colleague, the senior Senator from California, Mrs. FEINSTEIN, to recently introduce legislation that will strengthen the process by which the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States, otherwise known as CFIUS, weighs national security risks. The CFIUS process was not originally designed, and is now insufficient, to address rapidly evolving technology, as well as the threats to our technological edge, particularly when it comes to dual-use technology that is important for national security reasons. The committee's current jurisdiction and the staffing is both too narrow and inadequate in order to address these evolving threats.

China, in particular, has proven adept at circumventing the current CFIUS process. It exploits gaps and creatively structures business arrangements within the United States to evade scrutiny. That can mean that there would be no scrutiny of those transactions on national security grounds, which is a troubling situation that our bill, the Foreign Investment Risk Review Modernization Act, or FIRRMA, is meant to address. The weaponization of trade and the use of coercive industrial policies are tools that China has been using for some time, and it is imperative that we give CFIUS the full authority it needs to ensure that our advantage in the U.S. military know-how and technology are not stolen from us and used against us.

It is important to note, in the wake of some critics' flawed objections, that my bill does not try to address all, or even most, outbound investments. Rather, it addresses a narrow subset—joint ventures where tech-related intellectual property and know-how are transferred. This is a threat to our industrialized base, or jobs, here in

America. If somebody can acquire both the intellectual property and the know-how to make that technology in China, obviously, those are jobs we will not have in the United States.

It is true that these technology transfers are already sometimes covered under current export controls, but the problem is that the harm to our national security is occurring despite those current export controls. So we need to do more. We need to step up to the challenge.

Export controls are not an adequate solution to the situation we are now dealing with because of their inherent limitations. For example, the intellectual property that is at the heart of many of these joint ventures implicates technology that the Commerce Department has, in fact, decontrolled; that is, removed from the relevant export control list.

One last point I need to emphasize is that currently joint ventures are often carefully structured, as I suggested a moment ago, to circumvent this review process. These joint ventures are essentially acquisitions by another name, which is why CFIUS should be able to review them for national securities risks.

Let me be clear, though. Foreign investment is a good thing. These joint ventures are not inherently bad, but we do know that China has used them strategically as a vessel for its activities to try to undermine both our national security edge and jobs in America. Foreign actors know that CFIUS, under normal circumstances, would block their attempt to acquire certain business units outright. So they have been very creative in structuring transactions to obtain the very same industrial capabilities by other means.

To address the national security risks, what we need is an upfront U.S. governmental review, informed by our intelligence assessments, of the foreign partners that are involved. We need to ask whether these foreign partners are affiliated with the Chinese military, for example, or some other potential adversary.

In China, there is no separation between public and private sectors because the Communist Party sits atop the entire Government of China and is basically embedded within all of these Chinese companies. They have an "all of government" strategy focused at beating the United States, economically and militarily.

I believe the opponents of the reforms that I have just talked about are trying to perpetuate the status quo as long as possible—not to protect our national security interests but just the opposite—so they can bolster their bottom line, regardless of its potential negative effects on the rest of our country and on our national security.

We simply cannot afford to wait while China whittles away at our technological advantages. The time to act is now. Our national security demands that CFIUS and export controls be

made to be interlocking and mutually reinforcing, rather than simply relying on export controls to address these national security risks, which would be foolhardy.

If we want our country to retain its technological advantage and remain the top military superpower in the world, enacting this bill is an essential piece of that. After all, if China supplants the United States—it is not only the top economic but military superpower in the world—the repercussions there will be enormous. We simply have not faced that situation where the U.S. Armed Forces were not the most powerful military in the world since before World War II. It is dangerous, as that war pointed out, when you have countries building their military, acting more belligerently, and inviting retaliation. Let's not start now.

The bipartisan bill that Senator FEINSTEIN and I have filed has been endorsed by the White House and is supported by the current Secretaries of Defense, Treasury, and Commerce, as well as the Attorney General of the United States. Let's not hold it up any longer.

I yield the floor.

THE PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Nevada.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

MAJOR STEPHEN DEL BAGNO

Mr. HELLER. Madam President, today, I rise to honor Maj. Stephen Del Bagno, a U.S. Thunderbird pilot who was killed on April 4, 2018, when his F-16 Fighting Falcon crashed at the Nevada Test and Training Range, which is north of Nellis Air Force Base. At just 34, Major Del Bagno's life was cut too short, but his legacy of leadership, commitment to excellence, and service to our country will be preserved by all those who had the privilege of knowing him.

I wish to begin by saying that my wife Lynne and I offer our deepest condolences to Major Del Bagno's family and loved ones. We join the Thunderbirds, Nellis Air Force Base, and the Nevada community in mourning this heavy loss.

Major Del Bagno grew up in Valencia, CA, and he graduated from Utah Valley State University. He received his commission when he graduated from Officer Training School at Maxwell Air Force Base in 2007.

Called "Cajun" by his team, he was in his first season with the Thunderbirds. The Thunderbirds are also known as America's Ambassadors in Blue. They are an elite team of highly experienced fighter pilots. In fact, only 325 officers have had the honor of wearing the distinguished Thunderbird patch. They are the best of the best.

In June of 2017, Nellis Air Force Base announced that Major Del Bagno was the first F-35 pilot to serve with the Thunderbirds. He served as the team's slot pilot and flew Thunderbird 4. Brigadier General Leavitt, commander of the 57th Nellis Air Force Base, called Major Del Bagno an integral part of that team.

Prior to joining the Thunderbirds, Major Del Bagno was a civilian flight instructor, he was a corporate pilot, he was a skywriter, and he was a banner tow pilot. According to the Thunderbirds, he logged more than 3,500 flight hours in more than 30 different aircraft. That included 1,400 hours as an Air Force pilot.

In his free time, he enjoyed snowboarding, he enjoyed water sports, and he enjoyed spending time with his family.

Major Del Bagno was laid to rest on April 15, 2018, at a memorial service at his alma mater, Saugus High School, in Santa Clarita, CA. More than 1,000 people attended the memorial and joined together to commemorate his life—a true testament to his impact on the community. During the service, his friends, his family, and fellow wingmen offered loving tributes about his skill, his passion for aviation, and pride in being a member of the Air Force.

Ilene Block, a former guidance counselor for the school, told a local television affiliate that Stephen was “always giving back” and said that he often visited the high school to talk to students about his love for flying. His name will soon be added to a wall of heroes at Saugus High School.

Lt. Col. Kevin Walsh, the Thunderbirds’ commander, said that Major Del Bagno “lived to fly and inspire the next generation.” He also said that he will be remembered “as a talented fighter pilot and a great friend.”

Selfless, driven, caring, mentor, an inspiration, a big dude with an even bigger heart, brother—those are the words that Major Del Bagno’s fellow Thunderbirds used to describe him.

In a video tribute from the Thunderbirds, one said:

Cajun—you had this way of immediately making people feel special, interesting, and included. The world needs more of that. And now, your memory is going to inspire all of us to be a little bit more like you. And hopefully we’ll make you proud. We miss you and love you.

The loss of Major Del Bagno is an enormous tragedy that has struck the heart of the Thunderbirds, Nellis Air Force Base, and every life that he touched.

Major Del Bagno’s death is a reminder that we are all forever indebted to the men and women who answer the call to serve this country and stand guard, training and preparing each day for when duty calls.

It is a reminder of what they give up and what they risk when they bravely step up to the plate so that we can remain an extraordinary and free nation.

It is also a reminder of the families, like the Del Bagnos, who have lost a loved one and paid a price beyond measure. They deserve our lasting support.

I urge my colleagues to join me in paying tribute to the life of Major Del Bagno and his unbounded determination that set him apart. These are the people whose characters embody the

American spirit, the people who truly humble us and inspire us through their unwavering commitment, the people who represent the very best that this country has to offer.

I close with this. In a video honoring Major Del Bagno’s memory, the Thunderbirds talked about how he would spend time teaching kids about flying as a Thunderbird. They said he chose to share his passion with kids. In that same video, there was footage of Major Del Bagno responding to a question about advice for kids who want to be pilots in the Air Force. He talked about the five P’s of success. This is what he said:

Find your passion. Find your purpose. Be persistent in your pursuit. Be personable . . . so humble, credible, and approachable. And then it’ll pay off. People are going to tell you “no” along the way—it’s just a test of your resolve. If you really want it, go out and make that known.

I am confident that Major Del Bagno’s legacy will inspire the next generation of fighter pilots, as well as Nevadans and Americans around the country, for decades to come.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

CONGRATULATING SENATOR DUCKWORTH

Mr. CASEY. Madam President, I was on the floor today to first and foremost congratulate Senator DUCKWORTH on the new addition to her family. We were anticipating seeing a new baby, and now we will be able to meet that child right here on the Senate floor.

We do want to commend and salute Senator DUCKWORTH, of course—long before today—on her life of service and remarkable courage and sacrifice, and our Nation owes her a debt of gratitude, not just for this recent news about her resolution but also for her great service to the country.

This resolution is an important step forward for the U.S. Senate in terms of the people who are permitted to be on the floor, and we are glad that we have such consensus to make it possible for the youngest among us to get to the floor.

It is also one way to demonstrate our Nation’s commitment to families and policies that allow children to get off to a strong and smart start to their lives. So many of us have worked on those policies for many years, whether it is making childcare more affordable, paid family leave, flexible work arrangements, or so many other priorities. I hope we can use this oppor-

tunity to continue to work together to benefit our Nation’s children, and we are grateful to be part of that effort.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

SYRIA

Mr. CASEY. Mr. President, I rise to talk about Syria and all of the horrors we have been seeing over not just months but years.

Many people around this Nation, as well as people in the international community—whether they are in refugee camps in Turkey, Jordan, and Lebanon, or in bombed-out neighborhoods in Damascus, Aleppo, and Homs—so many people across the country and across the world are wondering, what will President Trump do next in Syria? Are we any closer to a resolution of this terrible conflict that will allow the Syrian people to rebuild their lives?

More than 7 years have passed since the Syrian people first began protesting the Assad regime’s brutal rule, and that may be a terrible understatement. The ongoing conflict continues to have an impact on U.S. national security interests. In these 7 years, almost 500,000 Syrians have been killed—half a million Syrians killed—and more than 12 million have been displaced from their homes. Sometimes that means they leave their homes and go to another community or another place within Syria, but of course many—maybe even most—have gone to another country. It is hard to comprehend that because that is a little more than half of the population of Syria. Imagine if half of more than 300 million Americans were forced to leave their homes because of a war, because of bombings, because of the brutality of a regime. That is what has happened in Syria. Half the population has been displaced, and half a million have been killed.

This is a conflict that began rather modestly but courageously. A group of young people scrawled graffiti on the walls of local buildings in protest of their own government’s repressive policies. This was in the context of a movement of young people across the region—meaning the Middle East—standing up against autocratic governance. The Syrian regime cracked down brutally, and of course we all know that the conflict escalated from there.

I remind my colleagues of the genesis of this conflict because so much has happened over the last 7 years, and the

path toward a resolution remains unclear. I have said before and will say again today that I believe, as most analysts do, that there is no purely military solution to the conflict in Syria.

Although the Russian and Iranian influence has always been present in Damascus, it has grown exponentially as the United States has ceded its leadership role on this issue. Beginning with the Obama administration, I have urged the executive branch to articulate a clear policy toward Syria, to empower our diplomatic and defense officials to demonstrate U.S. leadership on this issue, and to resist ceding our regional influence to adversaries like Russia and Iran.

We cannot afford to ignore the carnage in Syria at the hands of the Assad regime and their backers—namely, of course, the Iranians and the Russians. U.S. vision and leadership are needed.

Following the illegal, immoral, and appalling gas attack that killed more than 80 civilians in April 2017, the U.S. military executed standoff airstrikes against Syrian regime military targets. That was a proportional response to a heinous attack on civilians, but I also encouraged the administration at the time to develop a comprehensive plan to address the Syria conflict. Then nothing happened—well, I guess not nothing. In the year since then, the President has disempowered and now replaced Secretary of State Tillerson, failed to take decisive action in implementing sanctions on Russian entities enacted by overwhelming majorities in the House and Senate, and he has continued to confuse our allies with his policymaking-by-tweet.

This week, I attended a briefing on this issue conducted by a number of administration officials, principally by Secretary Mattis. I was impressed with his goal of developing a cohesive Syria strategy; however, I remain concerned that no clear strategy has yet emerged to promote U.S. national security interests in the region, to advance the national security of our allies, such as Israel, or to protect the innocent Syrians being targeted by their own government. This lack of a consistent and considered strategy has given Bashar al-Assad the political space to continue to commit war crimes—and that is what they are, war crimes.

Just one day after President Trump announced—again on Twitter—that the United States would soon be withdrawing from Syria, Assad's forces committed another heinous chemical weapons attack on a town that had already been suffering under siege by the Russian-backed Syrian Army. At least 56 civilians were killed in 24 hours.

Now, of course, we all know that last week, the United States, the United Kingdom, and France responded with missile strikes against three Syrian chemical weapons development and storage facilities. But we have not heard what the administration plans to do next to work with our allies and partners on the humanitarian and political aspects of this conflict.

Over the last several years, Russian, Iranian, and Turkish leaders have met to discuss the future of Syria. We all saw that picture of Mr. Ruhani, Mr. Erdogan, and Mr. Putin—three of our government's adversaries. Sometimes we work with them, but on most days, at least two of the three—the Russian and Iranian leaders—are adversaries. Certainly Mr. Erdogan has been back and forth between being an adversary and having an alliance with us on some issues. That picture was very disturbing. Are we going to allow those three to dictate policy not just in Syria but in the Middle East? Those three? I don't think so. I don't think that is what American policy should be.

By failing to engage in these negotiations, the United States has ceded control of the outcomes to states with national interests often in direct conflict with our own. The Russian Government has made clear that they believe that all Syrian territory must return to the Assad regime's control before political reforms can be considered. The Iranian regime has made clear that their objective is to remain in control of territory—either directly or through proxies—from Tehran to Beirut.

This is unacceptable. Assad's continued presence in Damascus is and will remain a recruiting tool for terrorists in the region. His regime allowed organizations like ISIS to grow and metastasize while Iranian forces have supplied tens of millions of arms to Hezbollah fighters who pose a clear threat to Israel.

At different points during the last 15 months, we have heard many conflicting reports of this administration's Syria policy. At one point, the administration said it would endorse a transition plan that would leave Bashar al-Assad in power for at least another 4 years. At another point, Secretary Tillerson said the United States would retain a long-term military presence in Syria for combat operations, surge “stabilization” assistance to opposition-controlled areas, and “rally the Syrian people and individuals within the regime to compel Assad to step down.” We have also seen the President say that we are withdrawing from Syria and, most recently, conflicting reports on whether the United States will levy new sanctions on the Russian entities that enable and support the murderous Assad regime. So there have been a lot of mixed signals by different officials over the course of these 15 months since the administration started.

Meanwhile, our Russian and Iranian adversaries have been clear and consistent in their policies: Protect their Syrian puppet, Bashar al-Assad, as long as it is politically expedient. The Russians and Iranians don't give a damn about the Syrian people or regional stability. In fact, instability serves their interest. They fuel and feed the regime. They advise and equip Assad's army and security forces and,

in the case of Russia, block the United Nations from holding the regime accountable.

The continued political turmoil in Damascus coupled with continued besiegement of the Syrian people will lead to long-term instability in Syria. The U.S. military should be commended for its leadership in the international coalition fight against ISIS and for supporting local and regional forces in retaking Iraqi and Syrian territory from terrorist control.

CENTCOM commander General Votel testified in March of 2017, and these are important words that he spoke:

We will defeat ISIS militarily; however, a lasting defeat of this enemy will not be achieved unless similar progress is made on the political front. Instability all but guarantees a resurgence of ISIS or the emergence of other terrorist groups seeking to exploit conditions to advance their own aims.

So said the CENTCOM commander, and we should listen to his words and take action in accordance with those words.

The administration must continue to lead the international community in humanitarian assistance to the Syrian people and accelerate support for programs that promote good governance, rule of law, and basic service provision in communities liberated from ISIS control. While we believe partners in the region should also contribute more generously, we should lead by example by robustly funding relevant accounts in the fiscal 2019 budget.

I am also thankful for the brave Americans who have volunteered their skills and their time to help the people of Syria survive—literally survive. I thank, in particular, the Syrian American Medical Society, doctors and aid workers who deliver assistance to displaced Syrians and to those who have remained within their borders. These courageous volunteers have stepped in to fill the gaps left by the international community and—I have to say—risking their own lives virtually every minute they are on the ground.

More than 7 years since the conflict began, the situation in Syria remains critical and U.S. leadership is needed more than ever. Although I, too, expressed concern with President Obama's Syrian strategy, a year and a half into the Trump Presidency, it is no longer sufficient to blame the previous administration. I urge President Trump to present a strategy for Syria that protects American national security interests in the region, pushes back against Iranian and Russian influence and aggression, and, finally, empowers the Syrian people in their pursuit of a stable, secure, and prosperous future for their country.

Thank you.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### NOMINATION OF MIKE POMPEO

Mr. BURR. Mr. President, I rise today because of what is on our schedule for next week. Next week, the Senate will consider the nomination by the President for his Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo.

This is one of those times that I want to compliment the administration on a great pick. Mike Pompeo is a great leader. Mike, as a teenager, decided he wanted to go to West Point. Not only did he graduate from West Point, he graduated from West Point at the top of his class. He went into one of the least likely places, the Cavalry. He was a magnificent leader within the U.S. Army Cavalry.

He went on to Harvard Law School, and he earned his law degree, but he didn't stop there. He was invited to be part of the Harvard Law Review, which is a very special cadre of individuals.

He left and started an aerospace company, as many know—a very successful business. After that, because he believed community service was important, he ran for the U.S. House of Representatives, State of Kansas, where he served three terms with great distinction.

He was tapped, all of a sudden, to the Director of the CIA in one of the most challenging times to be involved in intelligence, much less to be the Director of the CIA.

By all accounts, those of us who serve on the Intelligence Committee and those people within the intelligence community but, more importantly, our partners around the world, after a very short period of time, have gained unbelievable respect for Mike Pompeo.

It is tough for me to believe that this is not a nomination we are passing like the last two Secretaries of State, John Kerry and Senator Hillary Clinton. The vote was 94 to 2 for both of them. I was here. I am pretty sure that I supported both of them, and it is not because I aligned with them politically. It is because I inherently believe that a President has the right to pick his nominees and for those nominees to serve, and short of something that is a disqualifier that the Senate finds in their background, the President should have the authority to have that person serve.

I just described to you the background of Mike Pompeo. Somebody is going to be hard-pressed to show me anything that is a disqualifier—other than politics. This institution has shown that politics never plays a part in nominations, whether we are in charge or whether the other side is in charge, regardless of who is at the White House.

This institution has been bogged down because nominations take weeks. We pass nobody under unanimous consent. Everybody is a challenge. It makes you wonder why people like Mike Pompeo would, in fact, go through the process to be confirmed.

Let me remind my colleagues, we just confirmed him for his post, so he has already been confirmed to serve in the administration in one of the most challenging jobs—the CIA Director. For some reason, people now find that he is not qualified to be Secretary of State. What could it be, other than politics, that comes into play?

I am here to attest to my colleagues that Mike Pompeo is a good man. He is a good husband. He is a good father. He has been a great leader. As a Member of the Senate with the charge of confirming nominees, I would say that this is the type of person we pray will be sent to us by the executive branch to confirm in a role.

I urge my colleagues on both sides of the aisle—you may have differences with positions he has taken in the past, but for God's sake, do not question his qualifications to be a great leader. He has proved it. Do not question his background from a standpoint of education or his commitment to the country. He has passed the hardest tests in education, and, more importantly, he has passed the most important test of patriotism. He has served his country with distinction. My hope, my plea with my fellow colleagues is that they will allow Mike Pompeo to continue to serve his country, this time in the role of Secretary of State. I urge my colleagues to support him.

I yield back my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Colorado.

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent to be allowed to speak for one minute.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, I rise today to recommend and urge my colleagues to vote for JIM BRIDENSTINE as Administrator of NASA. We will be voting on his nomination momentarily.

JIM BRIDENSTINE has incredible experience, an incredible resume, and an incredible understanding of the mission before NASA. We need somebody with a vision. We need somebody who actually has an idea of where we should take our great space mission—somebody who has commercial experience, somebody who has government experience, somebody who has management experience, and, yes, somebody who has experience within the industry itself, and that person is JIM BRIDENSTINE.

JIM has bipartisan support and support from the House. My fellow colleague, Democratic Congressman ED PERLMUTTER from Colorado, along with a dozen other Democratic Members from the House of Representatives, said that JIM BRIDENSTINE will be an excellent NASA Administrator. He has the understanding, background, capability, and, more importantly, the drive and desire to do an excellent and outstanding job at NASA. I urge my colleagues to vote yes.

You just heard our colleague RICHARD BURR talk about Director Pompeo's nomination as Secretary of State.

Blind bipartisanship cannot be the only reason that drives votes in this Chamber. Whether it is for the Secretary of State or the Director of NASA, I urge my colleagues to vote yes, put partisanship aside, and start moving these nominations and doing what is right for this country. I urge my colleagues to vote yes on JIM BRIDENSTINE.

I yield back my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is, Will the Senate advise and consent to the Bridenstine nomination?

Mr. GRASSLEY. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk called the roll.

Mr. CORNYN. The following Senator is necessarily absent: the Senator from Arizona (Mr. MCCAIN).

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PERDUE). Are there any other Senators in the Chamber desiring to vote?

The result was announced—yeas 50, nays 49, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 80 Ex.]

#### YEAS—50

Alexander	Flake	Paul
Barrasso	Gardner	Perdue
Blunt	Graham	Portman
Boozman	Grassley	Risch
Burr	Hatch	Roberts
Capito	Heller	Rounds
Cassidy	Hoeven	Rubio
Collins	Hyde-Smith	Sasse
Corker	Inhofe	Scott
Cornyn	Isakson	Shelby
Cotton	Johnson	Sullivan
Crapo	Kennedy	Thune
Cruz	Lankford	Tillis
Daines	Lee	Toomey
Enzi	McConnell	Wicker
Ernst	Moran	Young
Fischer	Murkowski	

#### NAYS—49

Baldwin	Hassan	Peters
Bennet	Heinrich	Reed
Blumenthal	Heitkamp	Sanders
Booker	Hirono	Schatz
Brown	Jones	Schumer
Cantwell	Kaine	Shaheen
Cardin	King	Smith
Carper	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Casey	Leahy	Tester
Coons	Manchin	Udall
Cortez Masto	Markey	Van Hollen
Donnelly	McCaskill	Warner
Duckworth	Menendez	Warren
Durbin	Merkley	Whitehouse
Feinstein	Murphy	Wyden
Gillibrand	Murray	
Harris	Nelson	

#### NOT VOTING—1

McCain

The nomination was confirmed.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the motion to reconsider is considered made and laid upon the table and the President will be immediately notified of the Senate's action.

The majority leader.

#### LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I move to proceed to legislative session.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The question is on agreeing to the motion.