

these reforms seem so driven by ideology and by a devotion to big government that they aren't actually listening to the American people.

Well, I have listened to my constituents, and every time I do, I learn something new. Every week I hear from Texans who explain how they are putting the new savings from the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act to good use.

One retired and disabled soldier named William Alderman says he lives on a fixed income and has seen it go up under the changes made to the Tax Code. He said he thinks the law will have "lasting impact," and he said "thank you." He said: "God bless Texas and America."

Another Texan, a retired Air Force colonel from Brownsville named David Teigen said the benefits sure felt like a lot more than just "crumbs" to him.

A third, Donnie Connell, from San Antonio, my hometown, said the tax law will result in close to \$4,000 worth of savings this year. Donnie is trying to make a better life for his family, and he called the reforms a "HUGE DEAL." When he said "HUGE DEAL," it was in all caps, I might add.

Our Democratic colleagues are so quick to dismiss or ignore normal, hard-working people like Donnie with the same old tired talking points and ideology because doing so is easier than actually doing the hard work of coming together on a bipartisan basis and passing legislation.

When they do this, they like to talk about corporations. According to their rationale, the 505 companies that have announced pay raises, bonuses, 401(k) match increases, cuts to utility rates, and other benefits aren't really helping the average worker; they are just somehow lining their own pockets. They seem to ignore that our old Tax Code ranked among the highest in the developed world and was an impediment to investment and the return of money earned abroad here to create new jobs and to build companies here so people could work and provide for their families and pursue their dreams. Instead, they say that stock buybacks, for example, which some companies have opted for, in part, reward corporate executives and well-off shareholders rather than workers.

The Senator from New York, the minority leader, has made those comments a number of times, which reflects a basic misunderstanding. Our colleague from Massachusetts has said that buybacks "create a sugar high for corporations." But none other than Warren Buffett—one of the most famous investors in the world and a Democrat—disagrees. He and others understand that it is oftentimes irresponsible for companies to sit on large amounts of cash. They need to put it to work for their shareholders, grow the business, improve stock values.

If companies buy back stock, shareholders can then go and invest the money in another company that might have had something better to do with

it, a company that has something greater to build or innovate and needs money to get the project off the ground. As one economist said, when it comes to buybacks, the money "doesn't go into a black hole. It goes into a financial market somewhere . . . [and then] a chain of events" leads to higher wages and higher productivity.

So as we hear and continue to spread the true stories about tax reform, let's remember men and women like Donnie Connell for whom the savings are literally a huge deal, and let's ignore the delusional, ideological arguments that have already been disproved. Let's keep finding ways to make the economy stronger and more dynamic, one characterized by more jobs, higher wages, and falling unemployment.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the vote on the Muniz nomination occur at 4:30 p.m. today.

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

The Senator from Washington.

Mrs. MURRAY. Mr. President, I come to the floor today to urge my colleagues to vote against the nomination of Carlos Muniz to be the Department of Education's general counsel.

The Department of Education's primary responsibility is to help schools educate our students and prepare them to be successful in life. A good education can open doors of opportunity for children who may not have thought that their dreams were possible, and a good education can lift millions of families out of poverty and into the middle class. That is certainly what a good education did for me and for my family.

As many working families are struggling today, we should be working to make sure every child can attend a good public school in their own neighborhood. We need to do more to ensure that every student who wants to attend college can afford it, graduate, and find a good-paying job and is not saddled with a mountain of debt. It is critical that every student, no matter what age, learn in a safe environment, free from discrimination, harassment, and violence.

This should be at the core of our Nation—that everyone has the right to a high-quality education, no matter where they live or how they learn or how much money their parents make.

As general counsel to the Department of Education, Mr. Muniz would be responsible for providing legal advice and assistance to Secretary DeVos. Her first year in office has shown how much she needs it.

Secretary DeVos continues to push her extreme privatization agenda even though millions of students, parents, and teachers have stood up and rejected it.

Despite bipartisan agreement in Congress on our Nation's K-12 law, the Every Student Succeeds Act, Secretary DeVos is approving State plans that do not comply with all of ESSA's guardrails—guardrails that were agreed to

by Republicans and Democrats in Congress to help ensure that no student falls through the cracks.

Secretary DeVos has rolled back protections for students and student loan borrowers, making it easier for predatory, for-profit colleges to take advantage of students.

Time and again, she has failed to uphold civil rights protections for students. She has tried to scale back the Office for Civil Rights, opened the doors for schools to once again discriminate against transgender students, and rolled back guidance for schools on how to investigate campus sexual assault. Especially in this moment when more and more women are coming forward and sharing their stories of harassment and assault, there is no excuse for those in power to attempt to sweep their stories under the rug. By rolling back this guidance, Secretary DeVos allowed schools to put the burden back on survivors. By making it harder for them to trust they will be believed, I am concerned that fewer women will come forward.

Mr. President, it is clear that Secretary DeVos needs an independent general counsel who will stand up to her when laws are being bent or broken. I am afraid Mr. Muniz has failed to convince me that is the kind of general counsel he would be.

He worked for a for-profit college company that preyed upon students and cheated them out of their education and their savings. He has a record of putting politics before students. He worked for the Florida attorney general, who came under fire for accepting a political donation from President Trump at the very time she decided against investigating Trump University—a sham university that defrauded countless students by promising them everything and leaving them with nothing.

Although Mr. Muniz and the Florida attorney general didn't stand up for students who were misled and defrauded by President Trump, many other States sued. Just last week—8 years after Trump University closed its doors—the \$25 million settlement the President agreed to pay to his victims was finalized, meaning some of those cheated by the President will now start seeing relief. However, Mr. Muniz's involvement in the Trump University case gives me great concern that at the Department of Education, he will once again not stand up for student loan borrowers defrauded by other predatory for-profit colleges.

I am afraid Mr. Muniz at the Department of Education will only be more of the same. For those reasons, I will be voting against his nomination, and I urge my colleagues to do the same.

NOMINATION OF JAMES BRIDENSTINE

Mr. President, while I am here, I want to briefly comment on another nominee who is being considered today

by the Senate, and that is Representative BRIDENSTINE. Since he was nominated to be Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, I have been expressing very strong and very serious concerns, and I wanted to come to the floor today to once again call on my colleagues to reject this nomination and to call on President Trump to send us a nominee who is worthy of the great legacy and incredible potential of our civil space program.

My deep concerns with Representative BRIDENSTINE fall into two categories. The first is his fitness for leadership of an agency that is steeped in science, given his clear lack of understanding of basic scientific issues, and the second is his ability to lead an inclusive and forward-looking agency, given his history of hateful, demeaning, and divisive comments and positions.

First, let me talk about his fitness to lead this agency. NASA is an agency that is committed to science, exploration, technology, and innovation. Over the years, it has employed some of the most brilliant scientists in the world focused on the most cutting-edge research, with an eye toward exploring new frontiers, expanding human knowledge, and increasing our understanding of this world and beyond. It was this commitment to science and innovation that allowed NASA to catch up with the Russians and launch a satellite into space. It was this openness to innovation that allowed NASA to cast humanity's eyes with greater clarity than ever before far beyond our solar system with the launch of the Hubble telescope. It was this focus on innovation and exploration that allowed NASA to put a man on the Moon—12 of them, in fact. The list goes on.

Without a commitment to science, NASA would not have succeeded, and if that doesn't continue, it will fail. That is why I am very concerned that Representative BRIDENSTINE not only is not committed to science, he flat-out rejects clear scientific consensus. As I have said before, in a June 2013 speech he delivered on the floor of the House of Representatives, Representative BRIDENSTINE repeated the debunked claim that "global temperatures stopped rising 10 years ago," and a March 2013 tweet from him failed to recognize the difference between local weather conditions and the broader planetary climate. That is a basic scientific concept.

Those are just a couple of examples. This may be just one issue, but it is very telling. I believe that Representative BRIDENSTINE's failure to accept fundamental scientific truths about Earth's climate will make him an ill-suited and dangerous choice to lead an agency with science at its core.

Second is my concern about his ability to lead an inclusive and forward-looking agency, given his history of hateful, demeaning, and divisive comments and positions. I have noted this before, but it bears repeating.

Representative BRIDENSTINE has openly expressed his opposition to the rights of LGBTQ individuals, of immigrants, and of women. In May 2013, he gave a speech and suggested that LGBTQ people were immoral. He said: "Some of us in America still believe in the concept of sexual morality." In response to the Supreme Court's marriage equality ruling in 2013, he stated that he would keep fighting for "traditional marriage." Representative BRIDENSTINE has a history of supporting anti-Muslim groups and has consistently defended a number of President Trump's discriminatory policies on immigration, including the Muslim travel ban. He even defended President Trump's comments about sexually assaulting women, saying they were "locker room talk." He has gone on shows and stages to stand with bigots and racists—not to debate them but to agree with them. And that list goes on.

Representative BRIDENSTINE is not someone who should be put in charge of NASA's diverse workforce. In 2016, NASA announced that for the very first time, fully half of their new astronaut trainees were women. I mentioned before that NASA has sent 12 men to the Moon. Well, we may be on track for a woman to be the first American to plant her feet on Mars.

At a moment in our history where we want every student in this country—every one of them—to dream big dreams and to strive for high goals and explore careers in science, technology, engineering, and math, regardless of where they are from or whom they love or what color their skin is, sending someone like Representative BRIDENSTINE to lead our Nation's space agency would send the absolute wrong signal and move our country in the absolute wrong direction. So I will be voting against that nomination, and I will be strongly encouraging our colleagues to do so as well.

Thank you, Mr. President.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

(The remarks of Mr. MERKLEY pertaining to the introduction of S. 2708 are printed in today's RECORD under "Statements on Introduced Bills and Joint Resolutions.")

Mr. MERKLEY. 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. CRUZ. 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 JAMES BRIDENSTINE

Mr. CRUZ. Mr. President, I rise to support the upcoming confirmation this week of my friend JIM BRIDENSTINE to be Administrator of NASA.

We are now in our second year without a Senate-confirmed Administrator

of NASA. Not only has that been bad for the United States, but it is also bad for the commercial space industry, NASA, and all of us who prioritize restoring and strengthening America's leadership in space. NASA needs a strong leader, and it will have that strong leader in JIM BRIDENSTINE.

I serve as the chairman of the Senate Commerce Committee's Space Subcommittee, and I am proud and deeply gratified that President Trump chose to nominate Representative JIM BRIDENSTINE to lead NASA. I can think of very few people I know who are more inspirational than Jim. Unfortunately, throughout Representative BRIDENSTINE's confirmation process, we have seen cynical politicians attempting to malign his character, despite the fact that he has spent his entire adult life in public service.

JIM BRIDENSTINE is a veteran and a war hero. He is a man of deep character and deep integrity. Having served our Nation in combat as a fighter pilot, he earned the respect of the men and women who served under his command.

Representative BRIDENSTINE's combat missions included airborne battlefield command and control and tactical air control flights in support of the liberation of Iraq, controlling over 180 kill box interdiction and close-air support missions, resulting in the destruction of countless tanks, armored vehicles, and time-sensitive fixed targets.

Representative BRIDENSTINE later transitioned to the F/A-18 Hornet while on Active Duty, serving at the Naval Strike and Air Warfare Center, TOPGUN command, where he flew both the E-2 and F-28. There, he received fitness reports from his commanding officers, which rated him as "the number one Hawkeye pilot and weapons and tactic instructor" and "the most tactically skilled pilot in the E-2 community." That is a remarkable record, and it is one that has been followed by honorable and distinguished service in the U.S. Congress.

Throughout my time in the Senate, I have been blessed to meet with a number of astronauts. It is worth noting that quite a number of those astronauts at NASA have backgrounds very similar to that of Representative BRIDENSTINE. He will be able to lead them as one who has served in missions similar to the ones they have served in and are serving now. I have no doubt he will be an effective leader of NASA and will work to ensure the safety of the men and women who step forward to save our country; that he will work to lead NASA in a way to ensure that America continues to lead in space, and, in particular, that NASA and the commercial space sector, working hand in hand, will move forward to implement the bipartisan commitment this Congress has made that man will go back to space and go to Mars and that, in particular, the first foot that sets on the soil of Mars will be an American astronaut landing to explore that next frontier.