

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 F28. 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.

I urge my colleagues to put aside partisan politics. If this vote were on the merits, Representative BRIDENSTINE should be confirmed 100 to 0 on the merits. I urge my colleagues to come together so we can have a strong leader of NASA, an honorable war hero, and a leader who will lead space exploration going forward.

ISRAEL INDEPENDENCE DAY

Mr. President, I also rise to join Israel and the Jewish people to celebrate Israel Independence Day.

This year marks the 70th anniversary of the establishment of the modern State of Israel. On Friday, May 14, 1948, Israel's founding father, David Ben-Gurion, brought together members of the Jewish People's Council in the Tel Aviv Museum. By then, the Zionist movement to rebirth the Jewish state had been at work for decades.

Ben-Gurion stood underneath a portrait of the pioneer of that movement, Theodor Herzl, and described the historic right of the Jewish people to the land of Israel.

The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spirit, religious and political identity was shaped. Here they first attained to statehood, created cultural values of national and universal significance and gave to the world the eternal Book of Books.

After being forcibly exiled from their land, the people kept faith with it throughout their Dispersion and never ceased to pray and hope for their return to it and for the restoration in it of their political freedom.

That writing had been recognized by the international community, he said, and declared the founding of the modern State of Israel. He also said:

We, members of the People's Council, representatives of the Jewish community of Eretz-Israel and of the Zionist Movement, are here assembled on the day of the termination of the British Mandate over Eretz-Israel and, by virtue of our natural and historic right and on the strength of the resolution of the United Nations General Assembly, hereby declare the establishment of a Jewish state in Eretz-Israel to be known as the State of Israel.

Eleven minutes after Ben-Gurion made his declaration, and over the objection of many of his advisers and the State Department, President Harry S. Truman courageously recognized the State of Israel. I am sorry it took us a full 11 minutes to do so.

Meanwhile, armies from five Arab States declared war and invaded, in an attempt to destroy the new state. Despite being outgunned and outnumbered, Israel would prevail.

The Israeli victory might not have happened without heroic soldiers who had recently returned from World War II, including Jewish Americans volunteering to go and help. Some volunteers provided badly needed weapons, others offered military experience, and some fought.

In 1951, then serving as Israel's first Prime Minister, Ben-Gurion established Israel's Memorial Day, which takes place the day before Israel Independence Day and which commemo-

rates those killed in the wars and the terror campaigns waged against Israel.

From Tuesday to Wednesday evening, Israel came to a complete standstill in honor of the 23,646 Israelis who have fallen in wars, and the 3,134 terrorist victims since 1860. I stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel in commemoration.

It has been seven decades since Prime Minister Ben-Gurion made his historic declaration of independence and President Truman gave his historic recognition, and I am proud to say that America continues to stand unshakably with our allies.

On December 6, 2017, President Trump rightly recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital and announced that the U.S. Embassy would be moving to Jerusalem, implementing the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995 that was adopted overwhelmingly by Congress. I have long advocated and supported the United States to take these two actions which are required to rectify a historic injustice.

Jerusalem has been the eternal capital of the Jewish people for over 3,000 years and the capital of the Jewish state since its founding in 1948.

I recently introduced a resolution reaffirming the deep connection between the Jewish people and Jerusalem and denouncing efforts at UNESCO that have attempted to rewrite historic truth and to erase from history undeniable facts. I am also proud my home State of Texas adopted legislation on Israel Independence Day last year to combat the anti-Israel Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions, the BDS movement. On May 14, 2018, exactly seven decades since President Truman recognized Israel, the United States will finally and formally recognize as much and open our Embassy in Jerusalem.

I, along with many millions across our Nation and across the world, look forward to that day, and we stand in alliance and solidarity with the people of Israel, celebrating the great friendship, the great national security alliance between two great nations.

I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

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

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

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

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

REMEMBERING JOHN A. WILLIAMS

Mr. ISAKSON. Mr. President, the Senate is a great place. It is a great honor to be able to speak here, whether you are discussing your beliefs on an issue of major importance, honoring a friend, or, on rare occasions but all too often when you get to be my age, paying tribute to someone who has given so much and passed away.

Such happened in my State this past Monday, on the 16th of April, when John A. Williams died. He was 74 years old.

John Williams was a giant in every way in our State. He was a giant entrepreneur. He founded two great companies, one of them called Post Properties, the largest apartment REIT on the New York Stock Exchange. He started it in 1993 and built it to new heights.

Most recently, a few years ago, he started PAC, Preferred Apartment Communities, a REIT also, and he did the same with it—employing thousands of people, building thousands of units for housing in America.

He set the pace of housing in his career. I don't know how many people have noticed that in the suburbs of all major cities today, office parks and apartment complexes of any size are now some of the most beautifully landscaped places in the community. Thirty years ago, nobody planted a stick. Nobody planted a shrub. Nobody planted a flower.

John Williams became the largest importer of Holland bulbs in the United States of America. Every spring, tulips blossomed at Post Properties apartment buildings. In fact, he changed the advertising mode for apartments. Instead of calling them apartments, he called them apartment homes because he wanted his apartments and all the rental units to be looked upon by the people who lived there as their home. He sold that concept and built that concept and replicated it over and over, and it became the standard in Georgia. I have traveled the country, and it has become the standard all over the country in terms of apartment houses and landscaping for major commercial properties.

He was a great entrepreneur, building two great companies and helping thousands of other people in many other ways to build their companies.

He was a great father, a great husband, and a great family man. His wife Nancy is a wonderful "first lady" in our community. Parker, Sarah Brook, and Jay, his children, are all great contributors to our community. They all know how lucky they are to have had such a great father.

He was a great sportsman. When I say a great sportsman, I mean a great sportsman. He built Ranger, a replica of the 1937 America's Cup winner, one of the biggest yachts in the world, and sailed the world on that yacht and won races all around.

Also as a sportsman, he was a minority owner of the Atlanta Falcons. He invested with Arthur Blank in the Atlanta Falcons. They almost got to the Super Bowl—they got to the Super Bowl; they just couldn't finish the drill with the Patriots. One day we are going to figure out a way to do that, and I hope, in memory of John, we will be able to do it for him.

John was a community man. Who have you ever heard of in your lifetime who, in the same lifetime, was president of two different competing chambers of commerce, next door to each other? He was twice the president of