

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.