

problem in terms of preventing foreign influence and enforcing election law? I couldn't get a straight answer. Finally, he told me: "The intent was to further efficient tax administration."

I can tell you something. I don't think Maria Butina was interested in anything that had to do with efficient tax administration. I don't think she was interested in anything close to that when she went to South Dakota with an NRA operative to set up a shell company. Maybe this was just Mr. Muzinich's way of dodging the question. If not, then he is basically suggesting that it is just fine with him for special interests and foreign actors to buy American elections because they may be able to sell the American people on the proposition that makes tax reporting easier.

I have said before that I don't agree with every Treasury nominee on every issue from the Trump administration. I realize that. Then there have been individuals on key economic questions whose nominations I have supported. I thought Jerome Powell, who was Donald Trump's nominee, was a very wise choice to head the Federal Reserve. I have supported the President on important economic positions, and I voted for plenty of Republican nominees to the Treasury Department before. Yet I do expect nominees to be straight with me and with the committee. After all of the bobbing and weaving on issue after issue, this is a nominee who doesn't come close to passing that bar. In my view, he has not met the commonsense, basic test of giving some sense of where he stands on the important issues.

I see my good friend and seatmate on the Finance Committee who is here, and we talk often about these issues.

I will just say to my colleagues that the proposition that Mr. Muzinich is going to be the building manager for the Department of the Treasury is just a little bit much to swallow when you look at what his colleagues said he had talked about in the past with respect to tax management and tax reform and other important questions.

Finally, in Mr. Muzinich's claiming that the Trump tax handouts will pay for themselves, he has failed on that issue by \$1.5 trillion. I am not going to support a nominee for this position who is going to bring unicorn and rainbow fantasies to tax policy and to these key questions that are so important to the American people. I urge my colleagues to oppose the nomination of Mr. Muzinich.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Florida.

AMERICA'S SPACE PROGRAM

Mr. NELSON. Madam President, I rise to speak on a subject that our colleagues know is very dear to my heart—America's space program. Although this is the last of many, many floor speeches I have made on the subject, I stand before the Senate with a heart that is full of gratitude, joy, and

hope for the future of our space program.

I have been extremely privileged to have witnessed and in some cases to have participated in the extraordinary triumphs of our Nation's 60-year quest to explore the heavens. I flew to orbit and marveled at the beauty, fragility, and seemingly peacefulness of Mother Earth, our planet.

I had the honor of making that trip with one of the finest crews to have ever flown in America's space program. There was CAPT Robert "Hoot" Gibson, our commander, as well as Maj. Gen. Charlie Bolden, Retired, our pilot, who flew five missions—four as commander. Of course, General Bolden ultimately became the Administrator of NASA for the entire time of the Obama administration. There was Dr. George Nelson, otherwise known to all in the astronaut office as Pinky. There was Dr. Steve Hawley, Dr. Franklin Chang-Diaz—the first Hispanic-American astronaut—and Bob Cenker, who was an engineer at the time with RCA, which was the satellite that we launched while in orbit.

It was a profound and humbling experience that reinforced my belief that we needed to not only be good stewards of our planet but that we should always try to treat others with whom we may differ culturally, ethnically, or socially with dignity, compassion, and respect.

In looking back at Earth from the window of a spacecraft, you don't see political divisions, racial divisions, religious differences. You don't see the suffering or the injustice that face those back home on the planet. Instead, you quickly realize that we on this planet, our planet Earth, are all in this together.

I have been filled with wonder over some of the greatest scientific discoveries of our age—the discovery of the signs of water; the discovery of, perhaps, even life on Mars; the discovery that our galaxy is full of countless planets—many of them, very possibly, inhabitable; and the discovery that our universe is being driven apart by mysterious forces known as dark energy and is filled with a mysterious material known as dark matter.

Along with my fellow Americans, I grieved when, tragically, we lost two space shuttles and the brave astronauts aboard. I have grieved as we have lost astronauts along the way, even in the Apollo 1 fire. I grieved with America as we thought *Apollo 13* was lost and how, miraculously, in one of NASA's greatest success stories—with three humans on the way to the Moon when the explosion occurred and not having any idea how we could get them back—the whole NASA team came together. The engineers, the mathematicians, the astronauts on the ground, the controllers, and the contractors all devised a way to bring back Jim Lovell's crew.

As everyone in NASA's family is keenly aware, navigating the heavens is as dangerous now, if not more so, than the crossing of the oceans was 100,

200, 300 years ago. Leaving the relative safety and comfort of home to explore new frontiers is every bit as important now as it was then. We must proceed with caution lest we foolishly put the lives of the explorers at risk, but we must also proceed with courage lest we risk remaining stuck on the ground.

I have also had the honor of collaborating with heroes like John Glenn, Tom Stafford, and Neil Armstrong on the future of our space program. I have been very proud to have played a little part in the establishment of our thriving commercial space industry with the drafting and passage of the Commercial Space Launch Acts of 1984 and 1988, back when I was a young Congressman, and to have witnessed the rise of and contributions of present-day space entrepreneurs like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos.

At the same time, I appreciate the steady hand and transformative contribution of the NASA leaders, like Charlie Bolden, Bill Gerstenmaier, and Bob Cabana. I can't help but remember the guiding hand of George Abbey—that was so strong—at the Johnson Space Center, and I have celebrated the long overdue emergence of female superstars, like Marilyn Hewson and Gwynne Shotwell, amongst the space industry leadership.

It has been a pleasure working in Congress with a number of my colleagues on both sides of the aisle to advance the space ambitions of our country because, as I have said many times before, space is, and should always remain, a nonpartisan issue. NASA is a nonpartisan Agency.

I am also encouraged by NASA Administrator Bridenstine's leadership in his early tenure at the helm of this Agency, and I wish him much success. I applaud him for continuing to make good on his promises to keep NASA out of partisan politics and to heed the advice of the Agency's talented and experienced space professionals and scientists.

NASA is a unique Agency, the head of which is like the Department of Defense. The Secretary of Defense is not looked upon as partisan; neither is the Administrator of NASA.

I could not be more gracious and humbled to be here today and to tell you, as we celebrate NASA's 60th birthday this year, our space program has a spectacular and an exciting future. It is a future full of opportunity, and it is a future that will require everyone—industry, Congress, and the Agency, as well as our international partners—pulling in the same direction to make it a reality.

If you go back a few years to 2010, Senator Kay Bailey Hutchison and I recognized back then that we had set NASA's human space flight program on its current dual path, to build private sector capabilities in low-Earth orbit and a government-led program for deep space and, ultimately, Mars. We recognized some of the misdirection and lack of direction the space program

had; it needed direction. Once Kay Bailey Hutchison and I passed the NASA authorization in 2010, that dual-path approach started to bear fruit, including our recapturing of a majority of the global commercial launch market—a market we had almost completely lost to overseas competitors.

We are also constructing the building blocks of the systems that will take us to Mars. In the last administration, President Obama said: We are going to Mars. Within a year, we should have two different U.S. vehicles safely transporting our astronauts to and from the International Space Station, which will allow us to increase the number of crew aboard the station and dramatically bolster our research there. It is research that will ultimately help us on our journey to Mars with humans.

I remain confident that we will continue to operate the ISS well past the middle of the next decade. As a matter of fact, Senator CRUZ and I are still trying, in this Congress, to get the date for the International Space Station extended to the end of the decade. It would be foolish to dispose of the orbital laboratory—designated a national laboratory, which is our toehold on the space frontier—just as it is reaching the most productive period, and that is what it is doing in its research on orbit.

There is still a lot more work to be done. We must focus our technology investments to ensure that the journey to Mars is safe, productive, and affordable. We need new propulsion systems to get us to Mars faster. Those are in the stages of research right now. As we begin conducting human missions farther and farther from Earth, we must ensure that each activity gets us closer to achieving the goal—which President Obama laid out for the decade of the 2030s—of “boots on Mars.”

We also need to prepare workers for the high-tech, good-paying jobs of the 21st century. It has been one of my singular achievements to have worked with other leaders in government and in industry to help bring about the dramatic modernization of the historic launch infrastructure at Cape Canaveral and the Kennedy Space Center.

All of these exciting developments would not have been possible without the talent, dedication, and commitment of the thousands of workers who poured their hearts and souls into the space shuttle and the space station. That same dedication and pride of accomplishment continue today with the building of new spacecrafts like Dragon, Starliner, and Orion.

A few short years ago, business at the cape was much different than it is today. Commercial launch companies were looking elsewhere to take their business, despite all of the available infrastructure and the amazing workforce on the Space Coast. Too much bureaucracy stood in the way of progress.

To address the problem, I convened the top leaders from the Air Force, NASA, and the FAA in Chairman

Rockefeller's office. I brought an aerial photo of all of the abandoned launch pads at the cape and got their commitment to work together with the private sector to bring these pads back to life. It is just amazing from that photograph to see all of those launch pads—all of which the older generation will remember gave so much inspiration to America in its early space days—abandoned. They are now roaring back to life with launches and landings on those very same pads.

I would be remiss if I didn't acknowledge, as I already have, Senator CRUZ and his leadership, along with many of my colleagues here, for joining me in the fight to pass legislation to force the Agencies to reduce the overlap and duplication in regulations. I am grateful to have worked with so many to pave the way for the exciting future that lies ahead for commercial space endeavors.

I thank the Appropriations Committee, and I thank the leadership of the Appropriations Committee, including the Senator here on the floor, the Senator from Vermont. The proof is in the pudding how, over the years, they have provided the appropriations as we have brought NASA back to life on this dual track of commercial launches, going to and from low-Earth orbit, as well as exploring the heavens, which is NASA's mission.

I can also say that proof is in the pudding of the space launches coming back to life because Cape Canaveral hosted two-thirds of the nearly 30 American launches last year. The day is fast approaching when we will see multiple launches on the same day, as well as the largest, most powerful rocket ever assembled lifting off from the launch pad, beginning our journey to Mars.

Quite simply, jobs and ingenuity are soaring because rockets are soaring. As go Florida's Space Coast and the Houston area, so goes the U.S. space industry as a whole.

As we continue to move forward, it is also imperative that we continue our world-leading science and aeronautics activities. NASA pursues some of the most challenging and enduring questions facing humanity: How does life come to exist? Are we alone? What is to become of us and our planet? Engaging and empowering the U.S. science community should remain a top priority, enabling us to find new discoveries and to inspire and motivate future generations of scientists and engineers.

History has shown us that the nations that cease to explore begin to decline and collapse. It is our very nature, as Americans, to explore. Would humanity still exist if humans had not spread from Africa, to Asia, to Europe, to the Americas, and eventually to the remote reaches of the Arctic and the isolated islands of Polynesia? Would we, as a nation, have fulfilled our destiny if we did not push our frontier forward? I think not. Will humanity still

exist far in the future if we choose to stop exploring now?

The cosmos offers us limitless opportunities to expand—not just to survive but to thrive. Imagine the first baby boy or girl born away from planet Earth. Imagine the first artist to paint a sunset on Mars. Imagine our solar system inhabited by 100 billion dreamers, innovators, and creators. Imagine a future where those people—perhaps the grandchildren or great-grandchildren of those in primary school today—look back on our era as the time when humanity began to journey outward.

I believe that as we discover and experience the wonders of the cosmos, we will achieve the greatest outcome of all. We will find that our home planet Earth and all of the life and love that inhabits it have become even more beautiful and all the more precious to us.

With that I say, resoundingly, onward and upward. As the command given from the ground after the space shuttle has passed through maximum dynamic pressure, as the main engines have throttled back and the shuttle has ascended into the atmosphere and the mission can press forward to orbit, the command is given: Go at throttle up.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Vermont.

GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Mr. LEAHY. Mr. President, of course, the senior Senator from Florida can speak from experience because he has been there—something no other Senator currently serving has ever done.

I believe they are bringing a chair over. If not, I will go get it.

On Friday, December 21—coming up fairly soon, just 11 days from today—the continuing resolution, what we call a CR, under which much of the government currently operates, is going to expire. Now, if we don't pass the remaining seven appropriations bills—bills that I believe the Senate is prepared to pass—the government will shutter the doors of nine Federal Departments and dozens of Agencies, and services the American people rely on will grind to a halt, coincidentally, just 3 days before Christmas.

There is absolutely no reason for the government to shut down. The Senate and House Appropriations Committees have been negotiating for weeks. I commend those Senators on both sides of the aisle. They have worked with us and certainly our staffs in conducting these negotiations.

We have a seven-bill minibus that would fully fund the Federal Government through the remainder of the fiscal year. We are very close to a deal. Six of the seven bills are nearly complete. Most of the funding issues are resolved. Only a few policy issues remain. A few hours of debate, and they would be all done.

Because we are the United States of America and we have to care about all