

building organization that seeks to foster personal and professional interactions between Israelis and Palestinians, Arabs and Jews.

I want to pay tribute to Shimon Peres's morality and courage. He called for reconciliation in times of strife. We can fill his legacy by turning this sober and sad occasion to a call for direct talks between the Israelis and Palestinians, for boldness and courage to return to the negotiating table to fulfill the dream and meet the expectations of so many living in this part of the world who are so desperately seeking peace.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. CASIDY). The Senator from Michigan.

NASA

Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, today I rise to speak about NASA and the human exploration program. NASA and our industry partners have made incredible progress in space exploration, and we are now closer to human missions into deep space than we have been since we last left the Moon nearly 45 years ago. We have set a lofty but achievable goal. We are going to Mars, and we are building the rockets and infrastructure to get us there.

Achieving a complex, long-term goal can be challenging for a government, and this is especially true during an administration transition. But we can't let up on the development if we are going to put a human on Mars. That is why I, along with a number of my Commerce Committee colleagues, recently introduced the NASA Transition Authorization Act of 2016. This bipartisan bill will ensure that NASA maintains a continuity of purpose over the next year. The NASA Transition Authorization Act will give NASA the stability needed to keep NASA's important missions moving through 2017. It is not just important to the agency, it is something that is particularly important to the thousands of small- and medium-sized businesses across the country where dedicated men and women are working hard to move our space program forward.

With this bill, we are sending a strong message to companies like Futuramic Tool & Engineering in Michigan. They are so proud to help build the rockets that will take us to Mars, and all of us in the Congress must stand solidly behind their efforts.

A few weeks ago, I visited the Kennedy Space Center to witness the launch of the OSIRIS-REx spacecraft, a science mission that will take a sample from an asteroid and return that sample back to Earth. I saw the launch infrastructure taking shape for the massive SLS rocket and the assembly and testing of the Orion crew capsule that will launch in 2018 aboard SLS. I also saw amazing work by Boeing, SpaceX, and the United Launch Alliance on their rockets and spacecraft, which will start sending U.S. astronauts to

the International Space Station in a couple of years. When you see the scale of these gigantic structures and the intricacy of the machinery, you really get a sense of how much power, energy, and precision it takes to conduct these very ambitious missions, and you see why we can't stop this momentum toward space. We are going boldly, and we are going to stay, and this legislation makes that point very clear.

Importantly, this bill authorizes the entire agency, reaffirming that NASA is a multimission agency with important missions in space technology, aeronautics, exploration, and education.

I am particularly pleased that the legislation underscores the importance of NASA's science programs. Investing in NASA's science mission leads to research and development of new technologies. These technologies increase the competitiveness of our space program and at the same time shed light on ways we can protect and improve our planet Earth. I cannot overstate the importance of this work to our Nation, our planet, and to humanity as a whole. I agree with many in the scientific community who believe we need to increase our investments in NASA science missions, aeronautics, and other areas of the agency, and I will work to improve these programs more comprehensively in future legislation.

I am also pleased that parts of my bill reinforces NASA's ongoing efforts to educate the scientists and astronauts of the future. Earlier this year, Senator GARDNER and I introduced legislation to promote American competitiveness through investments in research and STEM education. NASA's inspiring exploration and science missions make the agency uniquely positioned to engage students in STEM subjects. I witnessed this firsthand when former astronaut Charlie Precourt joined me in speaking to a group of Michigan students last year. I can assure you the students were much more excited to talk to a former astronaut than a U.S. Senator.

It is also my hope that we can move forward and pass the space weather bill that Senator GARDNER and I introduced earlier this year. This legislation assigns roles to the various Federal agencies involved with space weather and improves the research and observations needed to better predict space weather events. The space weather bill, together with the NASA bill, represents a strong and positive bipartisan consensus for our space program, including space science. Heliophysics, or the study of the Sun, is a critical component of NASA's science research mission and has major implications for life here on Earth.

I was also pleased to see that NASA's new Associate Administrator for Science, University of Michigan professor Dr. Thomas Zurbuchen, has a strong background in space weather. I wish him good luck in his new role.

I wish to congratulate Senator CRUZ, Chairman THUNE, Ranking Member

NELSON, Senator WICKER, Senator RUBIO, Senator UDALL, and Senator CANTWELL for their hard work on the NASA transition act, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure that NASA has a steady path forward to keep making groundbreaking discoveries and inspiring Americans for years to come.

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

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

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The majority leader is recognized.

AMENDING THE GULLAH/GEECHEE CULTURAL HERITAGE ACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of Calendar No. 573, H.R. 3004.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 3004) to amend the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Act to extend the authorization for the Gullah/Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor Commission.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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

The bill (H.R. 3004) was ordered to a third reading, was read the third time, and passed.

BATHROOMS ACCESSIBLE IN EVERY SITUATION ACT

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate proceed to the immediate consideration of H.R. 5147, which was received from the House.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report the bill by title.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

A bill (H.R. 5147) to amend title 40, United States Code, to require restrooms in public buildings to be equipped with baby changing facilities.

There being no objection, the Senate proceeded to consider the bill.

Mr. McCONNELL. I ask unanimous consent that the bill be considered read a third time and passed and the motion to reconsider be considered made and laid upon the table.

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