White House announces intent to nominate Director of the U.S. Geological Survey and re-nominates heads of key science agencies

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One year after taking office, President Donald Trump announced his intent to nominate Dr. James Reilly to be Director of the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) at the Department of the Interior. After a 13-year career at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), during which he flew three spaceflight missions and conducted five spacewalks, Dr. Reilly currently serves as a technical advisor on space operations for the U.S. Air Force’s National Security Space Institute in Colorado Springs, Colorado. Dr. Reilly earned his B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. in geosciences from the University of Texas at Dallas; his studies included a scientific expedition to Marie Byrd Land, West Antarctica, to research isotope geochronology. Prior to joining NASA, Dr. Reilly worked for 15 years as an oil and gas exploration geologist with Enserch Exploration, Inc. Following his career at NASA, Dr. Reilly served as an administrator for the American Public University System, retired from the U.S. Navy as a Lieutenant Commander, and started his own firm, March 25 Management. Reflecting on his experience working at the International Space Station, Dr. Reilly stated, “There hasn’t been a moment when I had the chance to look down on our planet from orbit when I haven’t been amazed at how geology has played a significant role in the development of humankind.”

After 98 presidential nominees were returned to the President on January 3 pursuant to Senate Rule XXXI, paragraph 6, President Trump sent a list of several of these nominations back to the Senate on January 8 seeking to fill key science positions in his administration. The list included Barry Myers to be Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), James Bridenstine to be Administrator of NASA, Kathleen White to be Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality, Andrew Wheeler to be Deputy Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and Steven Gardner to be Director of the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement. This list did not include Michael Dourson, who was previously nominated for Assistant Administrator for Prevention, Pesticides, and Toxic Substances for the EPA. On January 18, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation approved the nominations of Barry Myers to be Administrator of NOAA and James Bridenstine to be Administrator of NASA on party line votes (14-13); they are awaiting confirmation by the full Senate. Committee votes have yet to be announced for Kathleen White, Andrew Wheeler, or Steven Gardner.

On January 25, R.D. James was confirmed as Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works by a vote of 89-1. To track the confirmation process of key geoscience presidential nominations from the Trump Administration, visit AGI’s Federal Nominations page.

Sources: Library of Congress; U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation; White House