

MSgt. Travis Riddick. Master Sergeant Riddick joined the Marine Corps after graduating from high school in Centerville, IA. In doing so, he was following in a laudable family tradition of patriotic service. His father and grandfather were marines, as well as his uncle and cousins. His twin brother recently retired after 21 years in the Navy. Travis Riddick certainly did his family, his State, and his country proud. He was awarded six Air Medals, the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, four Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medals, seven Marine Corps Good Conduct Medals, two National Defense Service Medals, the Southwest Asia Service Medal, the Afghanistan Campaign Medal, the Iraq Campaign Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Expeditionary Medal, the Global War on Terrorism Service Medal, the Armed Forces Service Medal, the Humanitarian Service Medal, the NATO Medal, the NATO ISAF Medal, and the Kuwait Liberation Medal.

My prayers are with his mother, Barbara, his father, John, and his wife, Jennifer, as well as his children and all his family and friends. His father reports that Travis loved his job and his mother said that he was the best marine ever. Our Nation is tremendously fortunate to have individuals like Travis Riddick who have the drive to step forward and serve their country with enthusiasm and honor. To selfless heroes like Travis Riddick, we owe nothing short of our liberty. Unlike at the birth of our country, when every person who aligned with the cause of freedom was putting themselves at great risk, those who enjoy our way of life today rely on a select group of patriotic Americans to preserve everything we hold so dear. We can never repay the debt we owe, but we are obliged to honor and remember them for their sacrifice in the name of liberty.●

RECOGNIZING THE NATIONAL HANDICAPPING CHAMPIONSHIP

● Mr. HELLER. Mr. President, today I wish to bring awareness to an event being hosted in my State this weekend. The National Handicapping Championship, NHC, will take place on January 27 and 28 at Treasure Island Las Vegas. Tourism and gaming are the backbone of Nevada's economy. It's a legacy that we must continue to nurture and I welcome events like the NHC to my state.

Las Vegas is a world-class destination unmatched by any other, and I have and will continue working to support policies that will keep Nevada's gaming industry growing and prosperous. Travel and tourism are a major part of my State's economy, attracting millions of visitors every year because of the variety of attractions and entertainment options available.

Considered the most anticipated tournament in the world for horseplayers, the NHC marks the con-

clusion of a year-long series of tournaments endorsed by the Daily Racing Form and the National Thoroughbred Racing Association, NTRA, where Thoroughbred racing handicappers wager more than \$12 billion each year. In turn, these dollars are put back into the horse industry contributing significantly to this agribusiness' future growth.

I commend the Daily Racing Form and the NTRA for choosing Las Vegas, NV to host this prestigious tournament and wish them a successful event this weekend. I look forward to building upon this success and encourage more events to visit my State. As a United States Senator from Nevada, I will continue to do all that I can to make sure that organizations such as these have the opportunity to enjoy all that my great State has to offer.●

ST. CROIX RIVER BRIDGE PROJECT

● Ms. KLOBUCHAR. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the remarkable commitment of a key group of Senate staffers, who worked tirelessly over the last several months to ensure the passage of a critical bill for advancing the bipartisan St. Croix River Bridge Project. By replacing the outdated, 80-year-old Stillwater Lift Bridge with a bridge that adequately meets the needs of local businesses and families, this bill will promote public safety and economic development in communities throughout the St. Croix River Valley.

Passing the bill was truly a team effort, requiring all hands on deck from lawmakers at the State, local and Federal level. We could not have done it without the leadership of my co-sponsors in the Senate—AL FRANKEN, RON JOHNSON and HERB KOHL—or our colleagues in the House from both Minnesota and Wisconsin. But most importantly, we could not have reached this important milestone without the talent and tenacity of the hard working people “behind the scenes.”

This includes the staff of the Environment and Public Works and Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committees as well as the U.S. Departments of Transportation and Interior, who worked closely with my office. And it includes all of the hard-working members of my staff who logged countless long hours to ensure we had a bill that was strong, effective and bipartisan. Their hard work made all the difference.

I am especially grateful to my Deputy-Legislative Director Travis Talvitie, who played an indispensable role every step of the way. Travis came into this process with a deep understanding of infrastructure policy, which he immediately put to work on this bill. When he wasn't meeting with community leaders from Stillwater and the St. Croix River Valley, he was coordinating with Federal agencies, and has become an expert on the important Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Thanks to the efforts of all involved, I am hopeful that Minnesota and Wisconsin will soon have a bridge that not only improves public safety and promotes economic growth, but preserves the incredible beauty of the St. Croix River.●

VERMONT STUDENTS' ESSAYS

● Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD these essays written by Vermont High School students as part of the second annual “What is the State of the Union?” essay contest conducted by my office. The following essays were selected as “Runners Up.”

The Statements follow.

MONICA ALLARD, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL
(RUNNER UP)

[January 23, 2012]

The American Dream is adaptable. The ideals that we have long valued are admirable, but often contradicting or impossible to achieve with a large population. In today's economy, that translates to the right to a free market economy, conflicting with the practical need for government interference; the right to succeed for oneself, battling with the need to work together for today's and future generations. As long as our country is able to prosper without certain regulations, I encourage it to run free, but when the winter comes and there is no more grazing, the horse must accept the fence that accompanies the grain. It is imperative that Americans collectively work to solve problems with social security, our economy, and our political system in these troubled times.

“Maybe if we ignore it, it will go away” has been the standard approach to growing concerns about social security in the last few years. Because of increasing life expectancy, more people are retiring than the system can support. When the newest generation retires, there won't be enough funds for everyone, unless something changes soon. A fixed rate retirement check is the logical solution, if we deduct money from the fixed rate check based on income. Working citizens would pay fewer taxes because only the people who need social security will be receiving it, and everyone else would have more money to put aside for their own retirement plans.

The predominant issue of the 21st century has been the international recession. Unemployment rates are high, but what many young Americans don't realize is the shortage in technical workers. There is a national trend towards traditional four-year universities, but technical careers are the road to take if you are searching for job stability, demand, potential for advancement, and self-employment or a local employer in today's economy. Through ad campaigns and offering incentives to students enrolling in technical universities. This is a simple way to lower the unemployment rate, while promoting local businesses.

Another important step in rejuvenating our economy is passing legislation that gives the national government more control over the stock market. Occupy movements have swept the country and it is time for Congress to respond, instead of hiring and appointing the same executives who were largely responsible for our economy's collapse.

In order to move forward, we need to present a united front. Republicans and Democrats are rending our country in two because of partisan pressure. We need radical change in the political system: remove all party authority. Primaries and power distribution in Congress put too much emphasis

on parties, cause corruption, and detract from the primary duty of Senators and Representatives to their states and country.

As our soldiers rejoin their families at home we are forced to turn our focus inward. Reform is necessary. It is not a question of when nor is it a question of how. Rather, the question is whether or not we are willing to do what is necessary to save our great country. God bless America.

KAYLEIGH EHLER-VOCK, SOUTH BURLINGTON
HIGH SCHOOL (RUNNER UP)
[January 23, 2012]

During a time of severe recession, a government facing incredible debt, and a collapsing financial system, our future looks dark. As a student that has been in the system for 13 years, and will continue to higher education, I have seen the benefits and complications of the current situation with education. Next year, I will be attending college and the cost of tuition is daunting. The high cost deters kids from attending college. However, in our world today, a high school diploma no longer ensures a hopeful career. Republicans and democrats alike acknowledge the need to invest in the skill and future of the youth.

Those who choose to continue their education to better themselves and America should not be punished by entering the real world chained down by debt; no one should be at the bottom because they choose to go to college. According to Helen Krispien of The Hopkinton Crier, the cost of private college is approximately 57% of yearly income, and therefore having two children in college is 114% of yearly income. The cost of tuition is expected to increase by 5% per year, leaving those in 15 years with tuition of \$103,946. Reform is needed. Colleges and universities must be required to cut their own costs. They know their budget better than anyone, and like our nation, they need to find a way to balance competition with lowering skyrocketing costs. This will allow for less borrowed education, and less government intervention. Furthermore, revamp colleges in hometowns allowing affordable options for the working class. As a nation, we need to eliminate the interest that banks charge on student loans. Instead, temporary tax breaks should be given to those who have children that have attended college for four years. This will allow for quicker repayment of loans, and will insure a successful future for both the youth and our nation. The government shouldn't be funding the system the way they do now; funding should be used on reform.

Aspiring students see college as an investment into the future; friendships, suitable partners, and a confidence in them. In four years, I don't want to enter into a world of hurt. I want to be a proud American, able to look back and see what this great nation can do to recover from the struggle we are facing. I want my parents to be able to retire; they have worked hard to raise me and my siblings, they deserve what they were promised. I am proud our government is willing to listen, and if we work together as one nation, America can be triumphant and re-establish the high caliber and positive regard we have for much of history.

KATE RASZKA, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION
HIGH SCHOOL (RUNNER UP)
[January 23, 2012]

MY FELLOW AMERICANS: The current state of our nation is one of anticipation; anticipation for the future and what changes will occur in the government regarding both foreign and domestic affairs.

Our country faces many difficulties: a struggling economy, the draining of re-

sources from involvement in foreign conflicts, too few new jobs, environmental degradation, uncertainty about how to pay for health care, and a damaged international reputation because of our handling of suspected terrorists. While we face many difficulties, we can find strength as one union and pursue solutions as a nation.

The United States must continue to lead by example. We should teach the world how to prevent the degradation of our environment. We as a country can promote renewable energy resources. This would create a larger, newer market which in turn would provide many new jobs. We have the power to directly change the future. We must lead the fight to preserve our planet.

It is unfortunate that while our country faces many domestic issues we have been deeply involved in conflicts overseas. However, our involvement in Iraq has led to a more stabilized and democratic country. As we pull out, we leave with a success.

Currently our judicial branch is deciding whether or not the recently passed health care bill violates individual and states' rights. All Americans deserve affordable health care. To be successful our citizens must be able to live without the fear of being unable to provide themselves or their children healthcare. It may be wrong to require all people to buy insurance, but a solution must be found by our esteemed members of Congress in which all seeking citizens will find affordable health care.

The indefinite incarceration of our citizens suspected of terrorist involvement is a wrong that must be corrected. The National Defense Authorization Act is a direct violation of habeas corpus and must be dealt with. I urge the Supreme Court to do so immediately.

The greatest solution to our problems is to make our education system the greatest in the world and prepare our youth for the competitive future. Educating our children will prepare our younger generations to solve new problems that will undoubtedly arise in the future. Currently, our children's test scores fall below other rising nations' scores. With our resources these results are unacceptable. It is time to ensure that all our citizens, particularly those below the poverty line, can attend college. Many of the students with low test scores live in poor environments with few opportunities. The success of our country must be made by building upon our society from the bottom up. It is time to raise our education standards and inspire change among those of us most down trodden.

Thank you and God bless the United States of America.

KAROLINA SOWULEWSKA, BURR AND BURTON
ACADEMY (RUNNER UP)
[January 23, 2012]

MY FELLOW AMERICANS: Our world is rapidly evolving, and we must adapt to it, or be left behind. As a sovereign power, we must lead through example. While progress has been made in three domestic key fronts, America must advance environmentally, economically and educationally.

We must take the first step in saving the environment, or it will not sustain us and our ever expanding nation. America must take initiative; by reducing our dependency on foreign oil, to improve relations abroad, and pursues for Americans at home. This is also an opportunity to create jobs for Americans, through national programs that would emphasize a greener economy, such as lowering the cost of public transportation, cutting gasoline and foreign fuel spending, and creating energy efficient plans for buildings and residential areas. By funding regional

and national projects, we create jobs and take large steps forward towards a low carbon future.

The necessary changes in the environment intertwines with our second key front: education. We need to fund and broaden opportunities ranging from the elementary to university level. More programs with emphasis on environmental service, protection and restoration would prepare the men and women of America to attack real world problems. If the budget for education were to increase, there would be more monetary provisions for grants, payment for teachers and new programs. Projects and research, such as investigating alternative fuel resources, and technological innovations, would not only benefit our environmental front, but would prepare our nation's future for the larger arena they must compete in. Let us not wait for another Sputnik crisis to advance in education and the sciences. We need simply to offer accessible opportunities for higher learning for the variety of people that seek it.

The environmental and educational fronts cannot begin to expand or flourish, without a sturdy and secure economic front. We must also adapt our freestanding market: the debt continues to rise, and the need to invest the American people in their nation increases as well. We must restore the people's faith in the government. Our middle class will strengthen. Unfortunately, this has to be achieved through austerity: budgets must be redistributed to focus on our priorities, such as our three fronts. While the free market begs for stimulus, we must not wane and give in, but offer a firm guiding hand to decrease the national debt. This must begin by focusing our resources on environmental changes, which would be brought forth through advances in educational programs. By becoming less dependent on foreign resources, we not only further invest in our nation and economy, but provide jobs for hard-working Americans.

If the United States is to remain a strong domestic and international power, we must adapt to our current situation and prepare for the upcoming year. We must make significant changes in order to progress. These changes on our three fronts—environment, economy and education—will be difficult, but they are changes that will only benefit us; these are changes we can believe in.●

TRIBUTE TO HAVEN J. BARLOW

● Mr. LEE. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize and congratulate former Utah State Senate President Haven J. Barlow on his recent 90th birthday. He is a true patriot who spent much of his life serving his State and his country, and I thank him for that service.

Haven was born January 4, 1922 in Clearfield, UT to Jesse B. and Issadora Beck Barlow. His mother Issadora was killed in a tragic car/train accident when he was just 9 months old, causing him to learn his share of responsibility at an early age.

After graduating from Davis High School, Haven earned a degree in business administration at Utah State Agricultural College, now Utah State University. He joined the U.S. Navy and attended officer candidate school at Harvard University. He served as a naval supply and disbursement officer in the Pacific and the Atlantic in World War II, receiving the Philippine Liberation Medal.