

Peratrovich Day and affirm our beliefs in equality.

Thank you for allowing me to embrace the memory of one woman who fought for equality for all, Alaskan Elizabeth Peratrovich.●

REMEMBERING KEVIN TONN

● Mrs. BOXER. Mr. President, I ask my colleagues to join me in honoring the life of Kevin Tonn, a loving son, devoted friend, and respected law enforcement official. Officer Tonn lost his life serving the Galt Police Department on January 15, 2013. He was 35 years old.

Kevin Tonn was raised in the Sacramento region. He graduated from Roseville High School and the Roseville Police Explorers program before serving in the U.S. Army as a military police officer at Fort Drum and later as a firefighter in New York. In January 2009, he returned home to California and graduated from the Sacramento County Sheriff's Academy.

For the past 3½ years, Officer Kevin Tonn was a member of the Galt Police Department, where he was known for his hard work, sense of humor, and dedication to the community and its people. In his short time with the department, he was promoted to the K-9 unit, where he proudly served with his devoted German Shepherd partner, Yaro.

Officer Kevin Tonn, like all those who serve in law enforcement, put his life on the line to protect and serve his community. His commitment to public safety and to the citizens he served will never be forgotten.

On behalf of the people of California, whom he served so well, I send my gratitude and deep sympathy to his friends and family, including his beloved parents Will and Mary Ann Tonn. We are forever indebted to Officer Tonn for his courage, service, and sacrifice.●

HONORING GORDON H. MANSFIELD

● Mr. BURR. Mr. President, on behalf of Senator SANDERS and myself, as the ranking member and chairman of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs, I wish to pay tribute to Gordon H. Mansfield, a great American hero, a distinguished public servant, and a boundless advocate and friend of veterans, who died on January 29, 2013, concluding a life of exceptional service to America.

On February 4, 1968, Gordon, then a young Army captain, was leading troops in battle in Quang Tri province, Vietnam, during the Tet Offensive when he was shot twice in the spine by the enemy.

Without the use of his legs, he made sure all his men were safe and all other wounded troops were evacuated before he allowed himself to be medevac'd. Gordon received the Distinguished Service Cross for his actions on that day—a day that marked a new beginning, not an end, to his service to our Nation.

The wounds Gordon suffered required him to use a wheelchair for mobility for the remainder of his life, but after 5 years of rehabilitation and thanks to his amazing determination, he graduated from law school and started a new chapter in his life.

In 1981, he joined the staff of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, and he later became its executive director. His passion for public service led him to become the Assistant Secretary for Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity at the Department of Housing and Urban Development. And in 2001, he joined the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA, first as Assistant Secretary for Congressional and Legislative Affairs, then as Deputy Secretary, and briefly, in 2007, as Acting Secretary.

At VA, Gordon brought his unique perspective on the needs of paralyzed veterans to the day-to-day management of the Department. He spoke out regularly on the need to improve access for paralyzed veterans to VA services; to ensure that disabled veterans were properly compensated for their services; and to provide opportunity for every paralyzed veteran to live a full, barrier-free, and productive life.

In 2009, Gordon retired from VA, but he did not conclude his service to veterans and their families. He became a member of the board of directors of the Wounded Warrior Project, serving a new generation of veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. He also joined the board of directors of the Disabled Veterans' Life Memorial Foundation.

Gordon's lifetime contributions to our country and its citizens were well recognized. In addition to the Distinguished Service Cross, his military decorations included the Bronze Star, two Purple Hearts, the Combat Infantry Badge, and the Presidential Unit Citation. He was inducted into the Army Ranger Hall of Fame in 2007 and the U.S. Army Officer Candidate School Hall of Fame in 1997.

He received the Department of Defense Medal for Distinguished Public Service, the Presidential Distinguished Service Award, the Robert Dole Service to Our Nation Award, the Disabled American Veterans Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year Award, and the Paralyzed Veterans of America Outstanding Service to Veterans Award.

We offer his wife Linda; his children, Gordon and Leon; and his entire family our deepest condolences. They, and all Americans, have lost a remarkable leader, a courageous hero, and a role model to all individuals with disabilities. He will be sorely missed.●

VERMONT ESSAY WINNERS

● Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD winning essays written by Vermont High School students as part of the Third Annual "What is the State of the Union?" Essay contest conducted by my office.

The essays follow.

CAROLINE BRAUN, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL (WINNER)

There is no simple cure for the abundant issues plaguing our nation. Not only are we recovering from a recession, but we also are confronting challenges related to climate change, healthcare, and education. While our efforts to address these issues are noble, our failure to solve them reflects a more concerning societal problem.

On December 14, 2012, twenty children and six faculty members were fatally shot in Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. Not only did this devastating tragedy leave close friends, family, and the local community in shock, but also the nation. Though it is remarkable that our country embraced the friends and families of those killed, we only seem to value such a strong sense of community after a crisis. The dramatic increase in violence in the past decade raises new questions about our current societal values and priorities: have we forgotten what's truly important in this new age? While we enjoy the many luxuries that accompany technology and contemporary life, has the lure of modern convenience eclipsed our fundamental human need to take care of and support each other, our families, and our communities?

Perhaps it is time we recalibrate who we are and who we want to be as a country so that the fundamental values on which our country was founded can once again flourish. How can one pursue happiness without access to basic healthcare, food, or the ability to spend time with the ones we love? Certainly when our forefathers declared our right to bear arms, their intent was not for corporations and special interest groups to profit from its citizens being armed with assault weapons intended for war. Instead of unbridled greed and big business dominating our economy, it is imperative we support small businesses so they can thrive once again. Environmentally, we have yet to replace our dependence on oil with renewable energy resources and reduce our effects on climate change. And while we all agree educating our children is a requisite investment in our future, teachers continue to earn, on average, 12 percent less than other workers with similar education and work experience.

As a world leader and role model for democracy and peace, we need initiatives that not only connect people and communities, but also ones that will act as catalysts for change. Increasing awareness of issues related to social justice will spark larger movements for societal change; whether it is reducing community violence, practicing business ethics, implementing renewable energy sources, advocating for mental health care, or investing in our teachers and schools. Instead of businesses and special interest groups being the sole influence on policies and the direction of our country, now is the time, once again, for all citizens to be heard, cared for, and respected. Although as a nation we have made and continue to make advances that were inconceivable just a century ago, our penchant for the new shouldn't trump our commitment to older values and fundamental human rights. EMILY ELLSWORTH, COLCHESTER HIGH SCHOOL (2ND PLACE)

Social mobility is essential to the development of the American character. The ability to overcome class distinctions and succeed economically through hard work equates to opportunity. Yet current U.S. taxation policies are harming the middle-class and widening the gaps of income inequality, thus narrowing the window of opportunity for Americans. Federally enforced legislation such as the Bush Tax Cuts and the income

tax on capital gains provide a disproportionate amount of benefits to the wealthiest Americans. This leaves a majority of citizens possessing less means to increase their income, obtain education for higher paying occupations and provisions for the next generation.

It is necessary to consider the purchasing function and the insurance function of wealth. The quality of a child's education and neighborhood is dependent upon the volume of wealth the parent has access to. Children also receive a very different set of choices and opportunities upon entering the adult world depending on their family's economic status. To combat the further detriment to future generations, taxes must be raised in areas which will inflict minimal harm, and produce the most beneficial results. America is experiencing the largest disproportion of wealth since 1928, and current taxation policy not only aids in widening the income gap, but harms the accumulation of government tax revenue.

The sale of stocks and bonds are called "capital gains." Until the 1990's, the capital gains tax was at 28%. Today its current level is 15% which enables less revenue gained from any individuals whose main source of income comes from stocks and bonds, such as wealthy businessmen. In 2006, for instance, Warren Buffett paid 17.7 percent in taxes on the \$46 million he booked that year, while his secretary paid 30 percent of her \$60,000 salary to the government. Simple practices such as restoring tax rates to past levels are essential to the aid of our country's recovery and to improve the state of the Union.

GENA CHIOLA, MOUNT ABRAHAM UNION HIGH SCHOOL (3RD PLACE)

Today, we face problems concerning the environment, war and conflict, as well as lack of resources. In these times, more than ever before, the solution to these problems lies in global communication. If we put our heads together, and help each other, we can create a plan to reduce climate change. If we increase our efforts to work out conflicts between countries, through effective communication, less people will lose their lives through unnecessary wars. Sharing of resources can occur when we effectively communicate between countries, which will reduce poverty worldwide. All it takes is effective global communication to resolve global issues.

One major global problem is conflict between nations. There will always be conflicts between people, it is part of being human, but how we deal with these conflicts is what makes the difference. Today, approximately 60 countries are involved in a war. Millions of people die each year from these conflicts. This fighting and killing is indeed a form of communication, but it is not effective in solving world problems. We accomplish nothing by killing people. We need to stop thinking of ourselves as being separated by national boundaries and focus on how to break down these walls. By communicating and working towards the same common goal, we will improve the planet. If we think globally, we will have more of a chance of communicating globally, and resolving conflicts through peaceful means, rather than war.

Enter Climate Change conundrum. Climate Change is the increased temperature of the atmosphere due to human carbon emissions. Our use of gasoline to run cars, and oil to heat our homes contributes to the heating of the climate. We are slowly destroying our environment, and creating an increasingly dangerous habitat for all living thing. It is no question that this is a dangerous issue that needs addressing. And in order to address it, we must work together. Bill

Mckibben, of Vermont, helps us do this. He organized 350.org, which is a global campaign to solve climate change. The mission of 350.org is "building a global grassroots movement to solve the climate crisis." He organizes global rallies and projects to bring the world together in the face of this crisis. He helps us communicate as a world to get the job done, since it can be done no other way.

Earth's lack of resources needs to be addressed and solved through global communication. 25,000 people die from hunger every day. Other poverty induced diseases, like AIDs, cause millions of deaths worldwide. However, by globally communicating, we can reduce poverty. Global communication can help us redistribute the resources. Some places are brimming over with resources, such as fresh food, water, and technology while others suffer. The U.S.A. has an abundance of resources. If we use global communication to be at peace with one another, we can share what we have, so that less people suffer. If the United States were to share resources with poverty stricken countries of Africa, people in Africa would have happier lives, while people in the United States would still have enough to live comfortably. This can all be achieved through effective global communication.

Global communication is the answer. If we all put our hearts and heads together, and forget our differences, we can change the world for the better, which is always the ultimate goal. Whether it's to prevent wars, bring the temperature of the atmosphere down, or to redistribute resources, it's undebatable that communication is what we need. Let us come together, and work together and never forget the importance of global communication.

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TRIBUTE TO JIM WILLIS

● Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, on March 1, 2013, one of Oregon's most dedicated leaders will retire. I want to take a few minutes to pay tribute to a public servant and one of Oregon's foremost advocates for veterans, Jim Willis.

Jim has worked selflessly to better the State and the nation. For 48 years, he has been helping others, from his two enlistments in the U.S. Air Force, including a tour of wartime service in South Vietnam, to a career with the Oregon State Police, to his time with the American Legion, and finally his leadership at the Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs, ODVA.

After his service in Vietnam, Jim knew what it felt like to return home to a country where veterans were not always welcomed and at times forgotten. He understood the words of George Washington when he said, "The willingness with which our young people are likely to serve in any war, no mat-

ter how justified, is directly proportional to how they perceive the veterans of earlier wars were treated and appreciated by their nation."

This is why Jim championed funding for the Oregon Veterans' Home, pressed for veteran health care funding under the Federal VA system, increased financing limits on veterans' home loans, supported the construction of the Oregon Medal of Honor Memorial and Afghan-Iraqi Freedom Memorial, and initiated the construction of a second veterans home in Lebanon, Oregon.

I cannot say enough about the distinguished efforts Jim has made over the last 23 years at ODVA on behalf of servicemembers and their families. With his direction, our heroes knew there were trained service officers in their county ready to assist them with benefits, home loans, and countless other issues. The trained professionals and the team he built at ODVA were always willing to help a veteran in a time of need. As President of the National Association of State Directors of Veterans Affairs, Jim coordinated these efforts nationally to assure veterans received what they worked so hard for.

I am grateful to have had Jim as a partner in several endeavors at the Federal level, including the effort to put a halt to pension poachers who were stealing money and benefits from veterans under the guise of veterans' assistance.

Even in retirement, Jim will continue to find ways to give back to the community. He will continue to serve on the American Legion National Cemetery Committee, on the Veteran of Foreign Wars National Resolutions Committee, and as Vice President of the Oregon World War II Memorial Foundation.

I could not be prouder of Jim and his life's work. He embodies the best of Oregon and the best of a grateful nation. As our servicemembers continue to come home and reintegrate into society, I am confident the benefits and services they have earned will be available to them because of Jim and people like him. His dedication to veterans will continue to have a lasting impact on ODVA for years to come.

Mr. President, I know Senator MERKLEY will be speaking after me to express his gratitude for Jim's many years of hard work. I'm proud to join my fellow Oregonians in recognizing the great service of Jim Willis and wishing him the best as he begins this new chapter in his life.●

● Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, I rise today to echo what my colleague Senator WYDEN said in recognition of Jim Willis, a native Oregonian and one of Oregon's greatest champions for veterans and their families.

As an airman during the Vietnam War, and as an officer for the Oregon State Police, Jim has dedicated his life to serving and protecting the citizens of the United States and the State of Oregon.