

50TH ANNIVERSARY OF PORTAGE, MICHIGAN

• Mr. LEVIN. Mr. President, one-half century ago this month the residents of Portage Township made a significant and lasting decision. They voted in February 1963 to incorporate, becoming the city of Portage. This decision provided many opportunities for this nascent, vibrant community to grow, enabling city leaders and residents alike to chart a course for future prosperity. This milestone will be commemorated in a number of ways throughout the year, including at Portage's city council meeting last night.

The city of Portage is a part of Michigan's rapidly evolving story. Historically, residents and community leaders relied on fertile farmland for agriculture production. In fact, in the late 1880s and early 1900s, this area was known as "Celery City." Today, it is home to thriving businesses, welcoming neighborhoods and abundant natural beauty. The population of Portage has more than doubled in the past half century, and a number of new businesses, large and small, have helped to transform the city's economic base.

As part of the celebration, Portage recently unveiled its new motto, "A Natural Place to Move." It speaks to the city's continued commitment to preserving its many parks, lakes, and trails in a way that encourages residents to stay active and healthy.

It is fitting that the celebrations planned this year include a mix of activities. A commemorative newsletter in February will highlight the city's rich history; a half-marathon and 5K road race later this month will showcase the city's extensive and impressive park system; volunteer opportunities spread throughout the year offer residents a number of ways to give back to their community; and a 50th anniversary concert this summer as part of the 2013 summer concert series will bring families and friends together to celebrate this important anniversary.

The city of Portage and its residents have much to be proud of. Together, they have steadily moved forward. This year is a moment to pause and reflect on the past, and to ensure that the next 50 years continues to be marked by growth and progress. ●

VERMONT ESSAY FINALISTS

• Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD finalist 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. These 21 finalists were selected from over 300 entries.

The essays follow.

SYDNEY ALDERMAN, MT. ABRAHAM UNION
HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

Today we often face the problem of excessive violence between people, starvation, and

economic problems. People aren't all getting what they need and something needs to be done. What would fix everything, broaden our universal communications skills and get things done quicker would be to unite globally. By working as an entire unit we can all communicate and work toward the same goal we all crave: peace. Uniting globally can solve conflicts causing violence, starvation, and economic problems.

Uniting globally will benefit the people of the world immensely. By uniting globally it would be much easier to distribute the necessary resources to sustain everyone, such as food, water, and energy. When everyone is on the same page and communicating thoroughly between territories, you can maintain fair trade and further discuss what laws and human rights need to be established as well. When we're all united for a common goal, let's assume peace amongst all people, discussion is more productive and conclusive and proper action can be taken at a faster pace. Actions such as bringing food and water to those who have none, and also getting the area with these conditions re-established for suitable living conditions. Everyone benefits from a united world.

The U.S. economy will be heavily benefited by uniting globally. When we unite globally, trade is faster and we can simply work faster because communication is quicker and more conclusive than when we're all thinking separately. Trade will therefore be quicker and we can be more productive about it with such open communication. It would be easier to discuss the distribution of currency amongst countries and people and how we can fix the current economic problems. Uniting globally will solve the biggest problems of the world. It will broaden the communication between territories and will help us resolve conflicts causing famine, violence, and economic problems universally. When we all band together we can accomplish anything and finally bring a new era of peace.

TYLER BRADLEY, SOUTH BURLINGTON HIGH
SCHOOL (FINALIST)

Our country needs to invest in clean sustainable energy and decrease our dependence for oil from other nations. Our nation should be investing in wind and solar power. Wind is a renewable source of energy, which will last forever. It does not pollute our environment and is all natural. Solar energy also provides us with clean energy, with no combustion. It too is renewable and causes no greenhouse gases. Although wind and solar, as energy sources, may prove to be expensive, it is a small price to pay for the health and safety of our environment. In contrast, we are eventually going to run out of oil and the high cost of transporting oil and our dependency on other nations needs to be eliminated.

We need to stop relying on foreign nations for our energy supply. If foreign governments continue to control oil profits they can use that money to fund terrorism mischief. In addition, these energy rich countries can restrict the oil supply and therefore make the United States a hostage to their demands. We need to end this cycle and invest in more sustainable energy sources.

We need Congress to work harder to obtain sustainable energy tax incentives like the Investment Tax Credit and Production Tax Credits. These credits will help reduce the cost of wind and solar projects and in the long run help reduce global warming. All across our earth we currently see record heat waves, melting glaciers, rising sea levels and extreme droughts and floods. The United States must lead the world in reversing global warming, to preserve a safe planet for our children and grandchildren.

ANNIE ARTHUR, WOODSTOCK UNION HIGH
SCHOOL (FINALIST)

To be a democracy, our country must be able to hear the voices of every citizen individually and the population as a whole. People all over the world are sacrificing their lives for the hope of the right to vote. In the United States, eligibility is simple. To vote, one must be a citizen of the United States and be 18 or older. However, a country as great as ours does not seem able to succeed in a very seemingly simple task: vote freely. The State of our Union is teetering on the edge.

In the 2012 Presidential Election, only 57.5% of the entire eligible population cast their ballots. About 93 million citizens did not participate in this most basic foundation of democracy. How is the United States supposed to run as an effective democracy if so many citizens remain silent in such a crucial time to make their voices heard? Granted, part of this lack of voting is caused by laziness, indifference or belief that one vote will not change the outcome. However, there are many citizens who want to vote but restrictions imposed at the state level have either attempted or succeeded to suppress participation in this election. In this recent election there were laws passed to hinder voter participation by making it difficult to register to vote, requiring voter photo identifications, miscommunication of date and times, and threatening voters with imprisonment for voter fraud. Officials also succeeded in cutting early voting periods, voting by mail, polling hours and number of locations. Even though courts temporarily struck down many of these efforts, there is no reason to believe that state officials will be deterred from imposing more voting restrictions in the future.

This national issue should not be determined at state level. Restriction on voting is a federal problem and should be addressed by federal powers. This is too important an issue to leave to individual state governments as clearly demonstrated by the blatant attempts to deny citizens their right to vote. The solution is to simply create basic standards on voting. The federal government could pass a bill with minimum guidelines for states to follow on voting laws. This legislation does not need to be a complex list of restrictions; this bill would be freeing up voting laws by listing only what needs to happen to achieve successful voting. Each state would then have the freedom to expand on these basic requirements. This bill could facilitate registration, polling hours and ability to mail in votes. It is an American's right to be able to vote. As the world's greatest democracy, no political party should be able to obstruct voting. The United States, a nation for the people, of the people, by the people needs to set a better example as the standard bearer of democracy.

JEANNINE BISSENETTE, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY
UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

Ever since Woodrow Wilson was elected in 1913, it has been a tradition for Presidents to address the nation with their State of the Union report. As President Obama prepares to present his State of the Union address, many politically concerned citizens begin to ponder the thoughts of what will be produced in the next four years.

With a current national unemployment rate of 7.9%, the numbers appear to be much lower than the 10% that the United States endured during October of 2009. Although these rates suggest a recuperating recession, they have not yet reached a level in which the nation can sit back comfortably. These high unemployment rates understandably result in a greater necessity for more families to reach out to social welfare services such

as food stamps and local food shelves. According to a local press interview with food shelf coordinator Mary Ann Castimore, the Vergennes Congregational Church found themselves serving a total of approximately fifty to sixty new families. People are struggling to find and hold steady jobs; feeding their families continues to be growing concern.

Corresponding with the current economy, the United States could certainly do more to address the concerns of the young people. With the lack of vacant positions in the working world, young adults are learning quickly that it does not matter so much what they've majored in, but what is available. As a high school student of Vermont, I have become increasingly aware of my school advisor's push for me to look into which fields are in need of laborers, rather than those that suit me best when determining an occupation. As the pursuit for jobs lengthens, it is important that the government restricts outsourcing jobs to other countries and create said jobs within the nation. Instead of outsourcing jobs, the United States should provide incentives to retain these positions in America.

As the United States adapts to the most severe recession since the Great Depression, the American citizens' fear of a failing economy is justified. Major issues such as the nearing fiscal cliff or changes in Social Security are becoming more common parts of American conversation. As January approaches, politicians in D.C. are running out to time to make the decision of who will be taxed in the coming years. By taxing Americans making over two hundred and fifty-thousand dollars, more taxes can be gleaned by the federal government. Additionally, more citizens being taxed results in more equitable terms. As a federal insurance program, Social Security is praised highly for the benefits it provides the retired population. Since American citizens are now living into their eighties, a shortage in Social Security money has materialized. The inadequacy of funds has led to an extended retirement age which is predicted to continue increasing into the future. The United States must continue to raise the retirement age in order for Social Security to continue operating. It takes time and multiple strategies to solve any major issue: there is no one perfect solution.

JONAH BLATT, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL
(FINALIST)

Good Evening America,

There are several issues that need to be addressed here tonight that will benefit our nation in one way or another. First off, I'd like to touch on the topic of unemployment. The unemployment rate has dropped significantly. The rate was 10% in November of 2009, which was the highest from January 1st 2009 to January 1st 2013. In the middle of that, the rate bounced up and down between 9% and 9.5% from 2010 to 2011. Now here we sit today on a continuous, steady decline all the way down to 7.7%, and I assure you it is not over. Jobs were being created at a rate of 151,000 per month in 2012 and we look to raise that number this coming year. My new plan allows workers who have lost their job to be placed on temporary jobs as trainees for short periods to retain their skills or gain new ones while still receiving benefits. This was released on April 19th where the unemployment rate was 8.2% and now it is 7.7%. It's working, America.

Cannabis, or better known as marijuana has become a major topic of discussion these days in America. Is it a medical miracle or an addiction amongst many? The Office of National Drug Control Policy and I have stated that we oppose the legalization of

marijuana and other drugs since legalization would increase the availability and use of other illegal drugs. Their legalization would bring more health and safety risks closer to your homes. The legalization and selling of marijuana could bring some positive to our attention. A potential boost for the economy if it was sold and taxed heavily. However in the end I strongly oppose the legalization process and it should only remain available for medical use only. The risks strongly outweigh the positives.

Over 50 years ago we created a strong, close relationship with Israel. We have done joint military planning along with military research and weapons development. We have continuously assisted Israel with \$3.1 billion in security assistance and I will not be the president to stop that trend. The only way for Israel to achieve peace with their neighbors is to begin with a clear and strong commitment to the security of Israel. They are also a big export consumer to our economy. We must stand by our ally through these tough times between them and the Palestinians. We will look to both sides to find a common ground to install peace back into the world between these rival nations. I am in support of resumption of the aid to the Palestinian government with a condition that the government renounce terrorism. Israel has a right to defend themselves from these Palestinian rocket attacks, but we will look to peace first in order to draw this to an end. Israel is an important ally in all perspectives. We must help them.

Thank you and good night America.

ALLIE BULL, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION HIGH
SCHOOL (FINALIST)

The United States of America is known as the land of profuse opportunity for all who come here. Throughout the history of this country, there have been events to be proud of and events that were not too glorious. As the world prepares for the new year of 2013, it is a good idea to reflect as we explore the state of this union, and gain insight into how this country is running.

Congress is seemingly dysfunctional right now. The current Congress has passed the least number of bills in history. This statistic is shocking and embarrassing. The system of checks and balances within our democracy is designed to prevent an abuse of power. It is also a known fact that our system takes longer to pass bills and get things done; however, the current state of gridlock is not okay. The nation is frustrated with the leaders and the lack of compromise in Washington. Congress needs to become a leader of the whole nation, and not individual leaders of each political party. The wall between each party needs to be let down and national issues need to be addressed. It is hard for congressmen to make decisions that could affect reelection; yet, the lack of progress being made is not making the constituents any happier. It is better for these leaders to leave the nation stronger and prosperous than when they arrived, as opposed to an unchanged, struggling country.

In the shadow of the Sandy Hook Massacre, gun control debates have resurfaced. This is a topic that needs to be addressed, swiftly and promptly. Semi-automatic weapons are completely and utterly unnecessary in the United States of America. There is no reason that a person should need or desire to own one. These weapons are killing machines and should be banned. Americans have the right to bear arms, but there is no need for weapons other than hunting weapons. Any weapons that do remain legal in this country need to be regulated and controlled with very thorough background checks. However, the fact that semi-automatic weapons are available isn't the only cause of these trage-

dies. Hollywood portrays gun violence as exciting and desirable. That, in combination with violent video games, leaves imprints in the brains of impressionable young people (including the mentally ill). Semi-automatic weapons should be banned, and violence movies and games should be regulated. In this country there is freedom of speech and expression, but the production of these movies and games results in harm to other citizens. All of these factors need to be addressed. Politicians who agree with this stance need to step up and speak out despite the possible damage to their reelection. The safety of the people should be more important than reelection.

America is a bright and prosperous place. There are a few issues dragging it down, but with the known strength of this nation, these problems can be solved. The only way to fix big problems is to lay down political barriers and work together, hand-in-hand.

EMMA DAVITT, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION
HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

The current state of our Union is multifaceted, filled with diverse opinions and numerous obstacles. Our Union faces an interesting future ahead, either a prosperous and promising future, or a destructive and deleterious future. It is up to us, the people of the United States, to do everything we can to ensure a brilliant future, to promise fortuitous and successful lives for our succeeding generations.

We are currently coping with the most intense, severe recession in our country since the Great Depression. 7.9% of the people in the United States are out of work, struggling to find jobs and earn a living. Detrimental taxes are traumatizing families, college graduates' degrees are rarely helping them secure jobs and, throughout these unfortunate situations, many Americans are still focusing on abortions and gay marriage rights. It is time for our nation to accept individuality, embrace the freedom our country was founded upon, and fix the major problems facing the people of the United States of America.

The unemployment rate is uncomfortably high. In 2008, many businesses closed, numerous workers were laid off and the unemployment rate began to rise. As a result, jobs have become more valuable, and at a time where few were comfortable with their living situations and current bank accounts, taxes rose. To address this situation, taxes must be lowered for the lower and middle-class families while returning the economy to a peaceful state, encouraging businesses to grow and expand in the United States.

The economy is not only affecting the working class of our nation, but also the children—the future. If children watch their parents and older siblings with college degrees struggle to find a job, what will make them want to go to college? What will convince them that attending college is a wonderful and beneficial experience? The young members of our national community will one day be responsible for our country and our only option to ensure a bright and promising future is to nurture, teach and help this younger generation. With this in mind, it should be of great importance to the United States to make college education more affordable for the young population. Through grants, aid and scholarships, many more students will have the opportunities to attend universities, and with an economy on the mend, we can look to the future with great hope in the highly educated body that will one day run the country.

Contemplating these issues, our Union has a lot to focus on. We have run ourselves into a deep economic and educational rut and it is our job to work together to climb out of

it. The future of our country rests solely in the hands of the upcoming generation, however, how can we have faith in the subsequent decades if our current society struggles to find jobs and attend college? The answer is rather simple, the young people of our country have the chance to make groundbreaking decisions and be amazing leaders, if given the opportunities.

TARYN DRUGE, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION
HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

In an idealistic world we would work for a common good. Countries wouldn't consider money, land, or rivalry. They would only see how they could create peace and maintain it. As Franklin D. Roosevelt said, "A point has been reached where the peoples of the Americas must take cognizance of growing ill-will, of marked trends toward aggression, of increasing armaments, of shortening tempers—a situation which has in it many of the elements that lead to the tragedy of general war . . . Peace is threatened by those who seek selfish power." It is my opinion that, in this world, we are not driven by the ambition for peace but instead by the ambition for wealth and power. We, the U.S., are no different, as much as we would love to believe otherwise and see ourselves as the peace bearers of the world. We must open our eyes to the truth. Wealth and power must be relevant in our dealings with foreign nations because these are some of the only factors that will drive negotiation.

An example of the struggle for wealth and power is the United States relationship with China. Currently, the U.S. is deeply uneasy about China, to whom we are deeply indebted, for they are our greatest supplier of goods. It is frightening to think that China's withdrawal could destroy our entire economy, yet our withdrawal from China would cripple them as well. Instead of the dependence creating unity among our nations, it has created discomfort and hostility. The power complex each country has creates the belief that dependence upon one another weakens us. When Thomas Jefferson said, "Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition," Jefferson could never foresee that U.S. dependence would extend overseas due to our economies' desire to manufacture cheaper and thus more profitable products.

China and the U.S. are two great superpowers, and each is just as self-destructive as the other. Without a strong and desirable alliance with China, the U.S. becomes weakened to possible foreign attacks and a collapse of the economy. The U.S. is feeling out of balance right now: so many goods are being manufactured overseas at the expense of U.S. jobs being taken away. This balance could be found when the U.S. comes to the realization that we cannot completely isolate China, and, at the same time, we must create a political environment that nurtures U.S. businesses that manufacture products domestically.

In an ideal world the bonds and alliances of countries would surpass the separation of race, religion, class and culture. We must work towards this ideal world, because in it we will find a far better future we could not possibly foresee today.●

TRIBUTE TO TECHNICAL SERGEANT GREGORY M. GRUTTER

● Mr. WHITEHOUSE. Mr. President, I rise today to recognize the heroic service of Rhode Island Air National Guard TSgt. Gregory M. Grutter. Technical Sergeant Grutter was awarded the Bronze Medal Star with Valor and the

Purple Heart, and I honor him for the courageous actions he took to earn these awards.

In 2008, Technical Sergeant Grutter was assigned as a security officer for the Defense Intelligence Support Office-Afghanistan. On March 20, 2008, while driving a convoy vehicle for the Guard, Technical Sergeant Grutter twice risked his own life to thwart enemy ambushes and save the lives of others.

In the first instance, Technical Sergeant Grutter used his own vehicle as a shield to protect Afghan National Police officers driving an unarmored vehicle. Then, noticing the Afghan National Police's machine gun crew in distress, he dismounted from his own vehicle, ran through intense fire, and helped the police repair their weapons.

While Technical Sergeant Grutter was working with the machine gun crew, enemy insurgents moved in to flank the convoy and began to prepare an attack. With great bravery, Sergeant Grutter ran approximately 200 meters over exposed terrain to engage the insurgents, which forced them to retreat. Shortly thereafter, the enemy disengaged and left the area.

Unfortunately, a second ambush was already in the making. A large number of civilians became trapped by small arms fire from enemy forces. Without regard for his personal safety, Technical Sergeant Grutter provided suppressing fire from an exposed position, which allowed the Afghan National Police to evacuate the civilians to safety.

As a result of the courageous actions taken by Technical Sergeant Grutter, lives were saved and the convoy continued its mission.

I thank Technical Sergeant Grutter for his brave actions and honor his distinguished service and meritorious achievement in earning the Bronze Medal Star with Valor and the Purple Heart. The courage he demonstrated during his combat mission brings great honor to our country, the Air National Guard and the state of Rhode Island.

Along with his fellow Guardsmen, I thank Technical Sergeant Grutter for his outstanding commitment to serving and protecting our country. We in Rhode Island are lucky to call him one of our own, and we are proud of him.●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mrs. Neiman, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the presiding officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The messages received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

SIX-MONTH PERIODIC REPORT ON THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY WITH RESPECT TO LIBYA THAT WAS ORIGINALLY DECLARED IN EXECUTIVE ORDER 13566 OF FEBRUARY 25, 2011—PM 3

The PRESIDING OFFICER laid before the Senate the following message from the President of the United States, together with an accompanying report; which was referred to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs:

To the Congress of the United States:

Section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)) provides for the automatic termination of a national emergency unless, within 90 days prior to the anniversary date of its declaration, the President publishes in the *Federal Register* and transmits to the Congress a notice stating that the emergency is to continue in effect beyond the anniversary date. In accordance with this provision, I have sent to the *Federal Register* for publication the enclosed notice stating that the national emergency declared in Executive Order 13566 of February 25, 2011, is to continue in effect beyond February 25, 2013.

Colonel Muammar Qadhafi, his government, and close associates took extreme measures against the people of Libya, including by using weapons of war, mercenaries, and wanton violence against unarmed civilians. In addition, there was a serious risk that Libyan state assets would be misappropriated by Qadhafi, members of his government, members of his family, or his close associates if those assets were not protected. The foregoing circumstances, the prolonged attacks, and the increased numbers of Libyans seeking refuge in other countries caused a deterioration in the security of Libya, posed a serious risk to its stability, and led me to declare a national emergency to deal with this threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States.

We are in the process of winding down the sanctions in response to developments in Libya, including the fall of Qadhafi and his government and the establishment of a democratically elected government. We are working closely with the new Libyan government and with the international community to effectively and appropriately ease restrictions on sanctioned entities, including by taking actions consistent with the U.N. Security Council's decision to lift sanctions against the Central Bank of Libya and two other entities on December 16, 2011. The situation in Libya, however, continues to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security and foreign policy of the United States and we need to protect against this threat and the diversion of assets or other abuse by certain members of Qadhafi's family and other former regime officials. Therefore, I have determined that it is necessary to continue