

house, but was met with stiff opposition in the Territorial Senate.

One by one, Senators took to the floor to debate the closely contested legislation. One Senator argued that "the races should be kept further apart." This Senator went on to rhetorically question, "Who are these people, barely out of savagery, who want to associate with us whites with 5,000 years of recorded civilization behind us?"

Elizabeth Peratrovich was observing the debate from the gallery. As a citizen, she asked to be heard and in accordance with the custom of the day, was recognized to express her views.

In a quiet, dignified and steady voice this "fighter with velvet gloves" responded, "I would not have expected that I, who am barely out of savagery, would have to remind gentlemen with 5,000 years of recorded history behind them of our Bill of Rights."

She was then asked by a Senator if she thought the proposed bill would eliminate discrimination. Elizabeth queried in rebuttal, "Do your laws against larceny and even murder prevent these crimes? No law will eliminate crimes but at least you as legislators can assert to the world that you recognize the evil of the present situation and speak your intent to help us overcome discrimination."

When she finished her speech the room burst into thunderous applause. The territorial Senate passed the bill by a vote of 11 to 5. On February 16, 1945, before Alaska gained statehood, and before Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. stood on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial and spoke of his dream for equality, Alaskans passed an anti-discrimination bill that provided for full and equal enjoyment of public accommodations for all Alaskans.

That night, Roy and Elizabeth celebrated. The two went dancing at the Baranof Hotel, one of Juneau's finest. They danced among people they didn't know, in a place where, the day before, they were unwelcome.

There is an important lesson to be learned from the battles of Elizabeth and Roy Peratrovich. Even in defeat, they knew that change would come from their participation in our political system. They were not discouraged by their defeat in 1943. They came back fighting stronger than ever and enjoyed the victory 2 years later.

Elizabeth would not live to see the United States adopt the same law she brought to Alaska in 1945. She passed away in 1958, at the age of 47, 6 years before civil rights legislation would pass nationally.

Roy Peratrovich saw that event. He passed away in 1989 at age 81. He died 9 days before the first Elizabeth Peratrovich Day was observed in the State of Alaska. But the Peratrovich legacy and family live on. This past summer I had the opportunity to welcome Nathan Peratrovich, great-grand-nephew of Roy and Elizabeth, to Washington DC. I was awestruck at the

magnitude of his visit. Here was a young man who never knew the discrimination his ancestors knew. He was never told he could not enter a store because of his race. He was never denied access to a school because of who his parents were. As we looked down on the Senate floor from the Senate gallery, I encouraged Nathan by stating that one day he could represent Alaska in the United States Senate. Nathan grew up with all the rights and liberties every young boy should have. All of this was possible because of his family. Seeing his face and knowing what a significant impact his family had on his current wellbeing struck me with a sense of appreciation. It is with that appreciation I honor Elizabeth and Roy Peratrovich today.●

VERMONT ESSAY FINALISTS

● Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I submit to the record these 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 13 finalists were selected from over 300 entries.

RILEY FORBES, MT. ABRAHAM UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

The most important issue for the government to solve today is human rights.

Everybody deserves equal opportunities in life. The State and Federal Government should help to make sure that everyone is free from torture, has the right to adequate food, clothing and housing, and has the right to health care. The most significant issue for the government to solve today is human rights.

Human rights are the basic rights that everyone who is human has. Human rights are important for everyone in the world to have. An important right is the right to have basic items, adequate clothing, food and housing. The United Nations has a right that gives everyone the basic items that they need, (clothing, food and housing). Whereas the United States does not have a right giving everyone basic supplies that is needed to live. "A man in India without access to clean water dies of a treatable disease" (Pinheiro). Everyone deserves adequate clothing, food, water and housing, but the problem is that these things are limited. There are homeless shelters and water, but there may not be enough for everyone. The Government should try to help provide people with the basic needs that are needed to survive.

The government should act to protect all people from torture. The United Nations and the United States believe that people should have the right to be safe from torture. A guard watches as a man is assaulted by an inmate in a jail Texas (Pinheiro). This man gets assaulted and the guard does nothing. The guard is watching; he should help to protect the people and not let them suffer even though they are in jail. The Government should pay attention and try to help people feel free and safe from torture.

In order for everyone to get a long life, people need to have their basic needs. The United Nations and the United States do not have any kind of right that says that everyone should have healthcare or be able to have health care. Obamacare will allow more people health insurance that they can afford (Marston). People who couldn't afford health care before now have a health care that is more affordable. The Government is helping

to provide people the access to an affordable health insurance.

The Government should help to support the people and their rights.

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DAMON FULCHER, SOUTH ROYALTON HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

The state of the Union is the most difficult to decipher in years. We, as a nation, are stuck in a time where the war in Afghanistan is dwindling, and we're trying to climb out of an abysmal fiscal pit. In a nation that has made its name for moving forward, controversies over human rights like the right to marry and the right to have an abortion are still as prevalent as ever. However, all is not lost, and this great nation will continue to forge on, despite these setbacks.

The land of the free still does not grant rights to every group of people. Gay marriage is one of the most hotly debated subjects in our country right now. Even though our Constitution states that all men are created equal, we as a nation do not always abide by this principle. Half of the American population is brushing a group of people under the rug, just because they have a different sexual orientation than themselves. The most recent example of this is North Carolina amending its state constitution to say that same-sex couples do not have the right to marry. This act takes the issue to a whole new level past legality. However, not all is bad. Several more states have begun adding to the pool where same-sex couples have the right to marry. The United States' highest court is taking on a case concerning a California proposition to ban gay marriage. This case will decide the fate of the issue in the years to come. Unfortunately, the most serious issue our country faces is not even marriage equality.

The most pressing issue currently is the economy. The great debate is whose taxes should be cut and whose taxes should be raised. The nation is greatly divided along partisan lines in this respect. These opinions are exemplified by our current President Barack Obama and our Speaker of the House John Boehner. One believes that taxes should be raised on the wealthy and cut on the middle class and the other, vice versa. This is the nation's problem. We simply need to get over which party we are a part of and work toward a common goal. There is guaranteed success if all of Congress works together to move forward.

The current state of the Union is complex, containing many positives and negatives. With the idea in mind that working together is necessary for the betterment of this nation, the President and Congress will move forward and fix the dilemmas that this country faces.

BENJAMIN GILBERT, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

This country faces one of the most important stages of change and development it has ever seen. The decisions we make as a nation in the next few years will shape not only the future of our own lives, but the lives of every citizen of this world. We won't be able to do this unless we come together. We are humans. It is in our nature to disagree. We are a democracy. It is a democracy's nature to disagree. Disagreement is a sign of a thriving democracy. It is also in our nature to solve problems, to be civil, to be fair, and to provide for a better tomorrow.

In the coming years, we need more doctors and researchers, to finally find a cure for cancer. We need more books to inspire. We

need more businesspeople to meet to the new age markets. We need teachers, and lawyers. We need successful young people to inherit this country. However, this will not be possible with the rising costs of higher education. The cost of sending a child to college is the highest it has ever been. If we as a country decide not to act, we cannot hope to make a better tomorrow for ourselves or for our children. In a state of economic turmoil, cuts have to be made. The military has been allowed to spend almost without limit. The funds that will keep Americans safe and soldiers well equipped should not be touched, but the endless spending must stop. Anything that is not absolutely vital and necessary for the safety, protection, and justice of the American people ought to be reevaluated.

Since its foundation, America has been the birthplace for equality. From George Washington fighting against the oppression of a monarchy, to Martin Luther King working towards a more civil existence, to Alice Paul screaming for the right to vote. Each step has helped open the door to equality. Each day we are tested, and each day we must answer history's call to change. Gay men and women have been quieted for centuries. But their time is here. No federal ban on love will stop the dawn of equality that is breaking upon this nation. This is not about Republicans or Democrats, religions, or politics, but about American people who love and cherish one another.

We have a broken system. Today, it is far too difficult to receive mental healthcare. It is easier to get your hands on an assault weapon than visit a doctor. We have seen in the past decade that this inequality leads to a tragic and horrific reality. Assault weapons are made for the military, and should be reserved exclusively for that purpose. Most importantly, those in need of mental healthcare should have access to it. We must forget about the politics and money, and focus on the lives of Americans who are in danger every day.

I have high hopes for the future of this country. We are all different. We are often very divided. However, we are strongest when we stand together.

LIAM HAYES, VERGENNES UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

Today our country is facing many problems that require the attention of not only the leaders in Washington, but the American people as well. As a teenager I believe the two most important issues are unemployment and our education system. I know that these issues are affecting our country, mainly in its overall growth.

First, I feel that our unemployment rate is quite unacceptable. However, in the past year it has been lowering slowly by the month. Although it may seem like a substantial amount, the area of the nation I live in continues to struggle to find jobs for students graduating college and for people retraining to new careers. I believe to continue this progress over the coming years America needs to look at the national picture of what jobs are there, what new jobs could serve a need for products and industry and what skills these new industries will require Americans to have.

Lastly, I think that when it comes to education in this great nation, the statistics and rankings don't lie. In math, science, and writing, the US is in the lower half when compared to other nations. If you look at statistics, compared to others, we are a more developed country. I am sure there are many things that we can do as a country to climb higher in the tables. I truly think that if there wasn't a long summer break, and there were one or two week breaks frequently

throughout the course of the year to take place of the large summer break. I think this would help because the long summer break leaves ridiculous amounts of time to forget everything you have learned in the school year. I also think that Americans have requirements for a second spoken language and to promote challenging classes throughout our schooling experience. If education is truly the key to our future, it needs to give us not only the basics, but the skills to problem solve, create and be the architects of America's new future.

CHRISTIE KERSHAW, SOUTH BURLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

I believe our nation has shown much improvement over the past year. Job growth rates have been increasing and businesses have been getting back on their feet after an economic low point. Even with these developments, there are many more aspects that need to be addressed and improved. I believe that as a country, the biggest issues we should be focusing on are improving the state of our environment and making college more affordable for students.

In my opinion, our government isn't taking the issue of global climate change as seriously as it should be. We are no longer able to turn our backs on this difficult issue because we are already starting to see signs of its negative impacts on us. With major droughts this summer in the Midwest and powerful storms like Super storm Sandy, it's clear to see that our climate is becoming more unpredictable and deadly, and the root cause of this is from climate change. There haven't been enough major moves put into effect by our government to combat this issue and I believe that both political parties should work closer together to come to an agreement on how to do this. There should be tighter regulations on the amount of greenhouse gases factories can emit, higher miles per gallon standards for new cars, and more money put into the development of renewable energy sources.

In order to make advancements in the field of green energy to slow down climate change, there must be scientists who are able to do the work. But we may soon be seeing a decrease in the number of these people because increasing costs for post-secondary education make it difficult for those who want to pursue a career in the sciences, or any other field, to do so. In order to ensure that our country will have enough highly educated citizens to help bring our nation closer to solving our energy crisis, we need to make college more affordable for everyone. Universities must lower their tuition costs and have more scholarships and grants for a wide range of students. If our government made loans easier to get with lower interest rates, this would also help remedy this problem. This particular issue is especially important to me because, as I start my college career in less than a year, I will be spending a lot of time worrying about how I will be able to pay for my education. Many other students feel the same way as me and some may have to postpone their plans for higher education. A decrease in college-educated citizens is not what our country needs right now.

These two issues of climate change and post-secondary education affordability are to me the most important on the list of many our country is facing. If both political parties work together, they will be able to resolve these issues in the near future.

SONIA LOWEN, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

The United States of America is the most powerful nation in the entire world but it's currently facing severe issues. The financial crash of 2008 resulted in the most disastrous

economy since the 1930's Great Recession. Climate change is creating extreme weather disasters and destroying nature. Not to mention that there is more income inequality in present day than ever before. These are only a select few because the list of issues goes on. The good news is that solutions are accessible but the bad news is that as long as corporate lobbyists continue to corrupt legislators, they will never be reached. The United States Congress needs to stop allowing corporate corruption.

The American economy is beginning to show signs of recovery but it still has a long way to go. Millions are out of a job and the government has a \$16 trillion debt hovering over their heads. The end of this recession is not going to come fast, but there are provisions that will begin to facilitate it, such as raising taxes not only on the rich but on the corporations as well. This will cause more of their money to go towards helping the government rather than manipulating it.

America is not the only place being affected by climate change but that does not, in any way, constitute sitting back and hoping someone else will fix it. The United States makes up 2% of the world's population yet they use 25% of the world's resources. The environment's safety is dependent on Congress to create new laws that will further regulate manufacturers to reduce harmful emissions. America's economy and climate would prosper greatly if they invested time and money into green energy. Unfortunately, automobile and other corporate lobbyists refuse to let that happen because they can make more money manufacturing oil-powered products.

Corporate lobbying has corrupted what the Constitution deems as the most powerful branch of government. Much of the legislation that is passed is beneficial to industries, whereas much of the legislation that would be beneficial to the general population is rejected. The corporations have gained this unhealthy amount of power by guaranteeing members of Congress a future job in the private sector in exchange for legislation that will favor whichever industry and/or corporation they represent. It is a gross injustice of congressional power.

The United States of America is at a fork in the road: they can either choose to take a step in the right direction and work for the interests of the people, or they can take a leap in the wrong direction and work in the interests of corporations. The country's future prosperity will be a result of that decision. It is crucial that the government abolishes corporate lobbying and strives to serve the people this nation was built for. This will not be easy, but it is critical in the process of rebuilding America.

ALEXANDRA MCFARLAND, WOODSTOCK UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

As we have seen throughout our country over the past few years, climate change is greatly affecting weather patterns. In 2011 Vermont was hit by Hurricane Irene which devastated much of the state and resulted in destroyed roads and homeless families. In 2012 Hurricane Sandy came ashore in New Jersey and New York changing even more of our fellow Americans' lives with massive destruction. Last year snowfall here in the Green Mountains was nearly half of the annual average. This year we have already seen two major snowstorms and snow levels are already approaching and surpassing the total snowfall of last year. We have to be concerned with these extreme weather changes. Weird weather may now be normal weather and scientists predict such patterns only worsening in the future unless we take action.

Climate change is a great problem that the United States, although on the surface has

attempted to tackle, needs to face head on. We need to once again be world leaders. Our first step is to launch a nationwide campaign, as there remains a huge portion of the population who still believe climate change is simply a myth, to help folks understand the complex science. Second, our nation needs to support scientific research and publicize new discoveries that could help to better our understanding of the climate change crisis as well as create and implement new green technologies to combat it. We need to establish a national plan to reduce our energy use.

The 350 Initiative, started by environmental activist Bill McKibben, is a great goal for our nation to strive toward. Through awareness and education programs that will lead us to conserve as well as the development of new and innovative green technologies, we will reduce atmospheric carbon levels to a more sustainable level of 350 parts per million by the year 2050. Scientists have shown that 350 is a safe upper limit for the amount of carbon in the atmosphere. The 350 plan puts a solid number that we can strive to achieve on a concept that so often feels much too great to tackle.

As one of the largest economies and one of the largest consumers of fossil fuels, we should be a leader in changing the way people around the globe think about our climate. It's not simply here for us to use at will. It's here for us to take care of and preserve for generations to come. These are feats that our country has the resources, the will power and the ingenuity to tackle.

We will not sit back and watch as extreme weather washes over our great nation. As we have in the past, we will face our worst problems and we will overcome them.

RACHEL MOORE, SOUTH ROYALTON MIDDLE/
HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

My family is like most families in Vermont: middle-class citizens. Both my parents work to pay taxes and to put meals on the table for my two brothers and me. Sometimes barely getting by is all we can do. Life is not what it used to be. When it is time for taxes to be paid for, it is always the hardest, but we skim by. Taxes are killers to lower and middle class citizens. I think the government should address this problem in full detail. It is time to be fair and to put the money back into the economy. In my opinion, when the President gives his State of the Union speech, he should promise to raise taxes for the rich and lower them for the poor.

Lower-class citizens pay taxes like everyone else. The difference between them and higher classes is their income. Lower-class citizens do not receive a lot of income. Therefore they have a harder time supporting their families. There is a reason why so many people are losing their homes. And most of those people are lower-class citizens. When the President makes his State of the Union address, he, in my opinion, should promise to raise taxes on the rich and lower them for the poor. It is not fair that lower-class people work twice as hard to keep their home, and to pay for food, when higher-class citizens do not have to work as hard and they do not need to worry. Lower-class citizens are not the only ones who suffer from taxes.

Middle-class citizens also suffer from taxes. They have to work harder to support their families than the higher-class. Being a part of the middle-class group, I have experienced the effects taxes have on our lives. Sometimes skimming by is all my family is capable of doing. I have sat at the table watching my mom write out and pay all her bills. I frequently wish that I were rich, so I could support all my family members and to

get them to a better state. But wishing has not done much for me, so I gave up. But now I have turned my head to the President and his colleagues. Maybe my plea can be heard by them, to lower taxes on the poor and raise it on the rich. I want to live an American dream, not just dream it. The more you raise taxes on the lower-class, which is the majority of Americans, the less money will go back into the economy. Tax the people who can spare an extra dollar, not the people who depend on that dollar for a meal.

In my opinion, taxes should be raised on the rich and lowered for the poor. Lower and middle classes have a hard time supporting their families because of taxes. What about that American dream people talk so much about? How will future generations be able to live that dream if they cannot even buy a house? It is time to do something, so, in my opinion, when the President makes his State of the Union address he should promise to lower taxes on the poor and raise them to the rich.

DERRYK O'GRADY, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL
(FINALIST)

My fellow Americans, we need to remember the tragic events that occurred in Newtown, Connecticut, change in gun control laws must happen. Unfortunate events like this can separate weak countries and divide them, but we are different. A tragic incident like this makes us more aware and stronger. As we move forward, we will use this as a learning experience to make this country safer by decreasing the ability to own a gun.

In addition to gun control, the following are other major topics of concern. First, we are in major national debt. Second, unemployment rates are reaching an unbearable high. Third we need to use more green energy and save more of the world's oil. Lastly, the cost of the education is incredibly high and still increasing. We must find solutions to these issues and I believe I can do it.

We need to better our international relationships. We need to stop involving ourselves in wars. Wars are a heavy burden, and over the past twelve years, we spent \$3.7 trillion and by the end, possibly \$4.4 trillion. This money does not need to be spent. We need to take care of our own business, impose higher taxes on the wealthy, and save money from wars.

More jobs need to be created for our country. The national unemployment rate is around 7.7%, and in 2010, we reached 9.8%. A steady decline has to continue to happen. The more people in this country working, the more revenue we can bring. This will help chip away at the debt because the more people working making money, the more money they can spend. This series of working, making money, and putting it back into the economy is what we need to create a surplus.

America's oil dependency is on a slight decrease since president Obama took office. We have limited the use of other countries oil by depending more on ourselves and this saves money. We need to find more ways of using renewable energy such as wind power, solar power, and hydro power: fossil fuel is not everlasting, while renewable energy is.

We tell high school students that they need to go to college to reach success, but then we throw them in debt. The prices for college are astronomically high and continue to increase. The average price for an in-state student is \$22,000 a year. How many students can afford to spend \$88,000? The answer is easy: not many. We need to find a standard price range for colleges to work with.

As we grow as a nation, I promise we will find answers. Our nation can overcome any challenge. Nothing brings this country down. We will keep fighting these battles until we

have reached our goals. Thank you, and may God bless you all.

SALEBAN OLOW, WINOOSKI HIGH SCHOOL
(FINALIST)

Dear President Obama, Senator Sanders, and Fellow Americans, From the birth of America, to America today, the driving force and the heart of America has always been the American success story. The United States of America is a country of opportunity and accomplishment. We believe in our country and our government. We believe that we will eventually succeed, overcoming any obstacles that we face. Our government and the entrepreneurs creating jobs made our country the best among the world, but new issues have appeared from the unemployment rate to the cost of college tuition to gun control. These are what we need to address.

Perhaps the biggest problem we face as a nation is the current rate of unemployment. According to the "Department of Numbers," during the November of 2012, the unemployment rate is down to 7.7 percent of people in the United States. This means that over 12 million Americans are jobless, including my mom. Many American families are losing their jobs because companies obtain their jobs. Companies and wealthy people are getting richer and those from the middle class and poverty levels are falling toward and below the poverty line. This is particularly true given the fact that the dollar is not worth what it was in the past. As a result, inflation is boosting up the price of all goods and services. As unemployment has been rising, the cost of education is increasing. Today, American colleges have imposed an extraordinary increase in tuition. Additionally, there are also issues such as gay rights, Social Security, illegal immigration and the War on Terror.

In spite of these factors, many students in the United States look for higher education after high school. They want to go to college and have a good career. If the government's influence results in increasing college costs, then students like "ME" will not be able to afford college. The average family cannot fully support their child's tuition costs. Our parents' incomes are spent paying for college debt. While many college graduates remain jobless, they still must face debts of more than 90K dollars. For our newly hatching generation, I believe that college tuition should be cheaper for everyone no matter what economic level the family is.

Regarding another critical issue, each year thousands of Americans lose their lives through gun related problems. Guns are designed to kill people easily and many lives are lost each year because the United States doesn't have strict gun control laws. The deadly massacre shooting at a Connecticut elementary school was heartbreaking. The outcome of this tragedy resulted in the deaths of 20 children and 6 adults, a painful scenario. Beautiful little kids between the ages of 4 and 9 years were slaughtered. It is my strong opinion that the government should pass a gun law that would reduce gun problems. President Obama and fellow lawmakers, I feel you need to be creative and figure out a better way to ensure young kids' safety. By choosing you, the United States is going in the right direction for a better future.

In conclusion, the challenges that we face with unemployment, college tuition and gun control are ones that we must currently address. We must make significant changes in order to progress. The success of our nation must be made by building upon our society. As in the past, we can and always will work hard and make America and the world a better place.

God bless the United States of America.

ROBERT PENNYPACKER, ST. JOHNSBURY
ACADEMY (FINALIST)

This year's Tax Rate for the richest are the lowest this Country has ever seen!

Today's tax rate means that person making \$379,150 pays the same tax as a person making seven million dollars. Thirty years ago this was different. In 1981 there were 16 tax brackets. Today there are six. The highest tax bracket for today's federal income tax is 35% for a person making \$379,150 or more. That means you're taxing a small business owner the same rate as a giant corporation president like General Electric's Chairman and CEO Jeffrey Immelt who has a salary of 3.3 million dollars as of 2011.

If and when the tax rate increases for the rich like many Americans want, it will not hurt the economy like the GOP is stating. Last September, the Congressional Research Service published a report countering Republican claims that lowering top tax rates would lead, or had led, to higher economic growth. "Changes over the past 65 years in the top marginal rate and the top capital gains tax rate do not appear correlated with economic growth," the report concluded. Republican Minority Leader Mitch McConnell responded by having the report suppressed, but its findings were incontrovertible. This shows that, with the rise in taxes for the upper class, it will not affect the economy like many Republicans are stating.

Also, we are at war with the Taliban and yet we still have lower taxes than ever before. How are we paying to support this war? Never before has the United States had lower taxes during a war. In 1943, during WWII, the tax rate for a person making \$2,593,984 (adjusted for inflation) was 88%. In that same year a person making \$155,000 (adjusted for inflation) was 38%. During the Vietnam War, in 1966, the tax rate for a person making \$629,530 (adjusted for inflation) was 70%. Also, in that same year, a person making \$83,104 (adjusted for inflation) was 36%. Today's tax rate, as of 2011, for a person making \$379,150 is 35%. A person making 1.1 million dollars tax rate pay the same 35%.

Should a person making \$379,150 pay the same rate as multi-millionaires? No they shouldn't. Why do we have the lowest taxes ever in the United States and yet be in a war? The United States should have taxes similar to years before. The middle class should pay the same rate. The rates for the middle class have stayed within the same percentage for the last 70 years. Meanwhile the upper class has gone from a 90 percent tax rate in the 1940's and 50's to 70 percent from 1960's through 1981, and 50 percent in 1982 through 1986. Now they have a 35 percent tax rate which is the same as a middle class citizen. The United States should raise the taxes of the rich.

REBECCA POTTER, BRATTLEBORO UNION HIGH
SCHOOL (FINALIST)

Congress is dysfunctional because of priority discrepancies. Some in our government seem to believe that holds, filibusters, and less legal tactics of delay and obstruction serve as necessary means to a greater GOP-dominated end. Others argue that while disagreement is key in a true democracy, so is compromise. Certain members of the Senate, where unanimous consent remains relevant in the scheduling and timing of legislation, stand by "holding" the Senate's progress on a bill or committee action. Others point out that this is 2012, where a hold in Senate exists as a euphemism for indefinite or permanent vetoes, often done in secret. In both houses, many forget that the true party holding the majority in Congress is the white, heterosexual, wealthy men.

While Congress' dysfunction directly correlates with the partisan gridlock we've been

witnessing over the past four years, this has more to do with flaws in the system itself rather than the puppets within it. Sure, people are selfish and want the connections voting a certain way or hiring a specific set of hands will bring—but what ingenious economic system provides the impetus for such action? Capitalism, at the root of it all, enables members of Congress and the wealthy holding the strings above them to exist as money-motivated figures of power. The privatization of education, healthcare, and human services creates the legislative standstill we've got in Congress, which dedicates an absurd amount of time to arguing over non-issues in a partisan lock. This allows legislation that matters often gets nixed in committee or shoved through without necessary debate.

Capitalist society has created a dysfunctional Congress, and until we fix the system we will keep getting the same results. The bandage for this infectious situation is compromise in the Senate and House of Representatives—impending compromise, I predict, what with a certain cliff looming over our heads. Antibiotics for a more permanent change would mean a re-evaluation of everything we've grown up being told was "American": federalized elections, spending limits on campaigns, socialized care for humans and our unalienable rights (health, education, safety), and public ownership of the land of the free.

AUSTIN PRICE, MT. ANTHONY UNION HIGH
SCHOOL (FINALIST)

My fellow Americans, Our country is evolving and changing in ways it has never before. We can either adjust or get left in the past. America was once the greatest power in the world and I believe we can get back to that, but we must take hold and lead with force. Although we are on the path back, we still need to focus on our military, economy, and civil rights.

Our military is the backbone of our success as a nation. With over nine hundred military bases internationally, we need our military to be strong as ever to protect our trading partners as well as us. The necessary changes that must be made are to increase our presence in the countries that are filled with enemies of the state and looking to do harm to the United States and its citizens. We must increase the spending budget for the military so that we will maintain our internationally renowned army. We as a country have the responsibility to not only protect our rights, but to protect the civil rights of others who don't have the ability themselves.

Further, we are in one of the greatest recessions since the Great Depression; we face unprecedented challenges as a nation to get back on top. If any country can come out of a depression and be even stronger than before, it is America, the home of the brave. Were the spending in any sector to increase, then there would be a huge influx of jobs that were created by all that new money. A higher tax rate for the wealthiest of Americans will help this nation get out of the greatest debt it has ever been in. It is time for everyone to pay their fair share. Although the taxes do need to be increased, increasing the taxes on small business owners will only hurt our economy because they will hire fewer workers.

There is also a great civil rights issue that must be addressed in our country. This is the marriage of homosexuals. I am proud to say that the state I reside in has done what few other states are brave enough to do by creating civil unions. There are a shocking forty-one states that ban same-sex marriage compared to only nine that allow it. I am asking for an immediate legalization of

same-sex marriage in all states, similar to that of the desegregation laws of the sixties and seventies.

If we as a nation are to be prosperous, we must grow and adapt to the world around us. In order to reach our goals their will have to be sacrifices made by every American. We must make changes to the economy, military, and civil rights in order to reach our lofty goals and reap the benefits of our hard work.●

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 11:35 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Novotny, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bills, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 267. An act to improve hydropower, and for other purposes.

H.R. 592. An act to amend the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act to clarify that houses of worship are eligible for certain disaster relief and emergency assistance on terms equal to other eligible private nonprofit facilities, and for other purposes.

MEASURES REFERRED

The following bill was read the first and the second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

H.R. 267. An act to improve hydropower, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The following reports of committees were submitted:

By Mr. HARKIN, from the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, with an amendment in the nature of a substitute:

H.R. 307. A bill to reauthorize certain programs under the Public Health Service Act and the Federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act with respect to public health security and all-hazards preparedness and response, and for other purposes.

By Mr. MENENDEZ, from the Committee on Foreign Relations, with an amendment and with an amended preamble:

S. Res. 12. A resolution recognizing the third anniversary of the tragic earthquake in Haiti on January 12, 2010, honoring those who lost their lives in that earthquake, and expressing continued solidarity with the people of Haiti.

By Mr. HARKIN, from the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, without amendment:

S. 252. A bill to reduce preterm labor and delivery and the risk of pregnancy-related deaths and complications due to pregnancy, and to reduce infant mortality caused by prematurity.

By Mr. MENENDEZ, from the Committee on Foreign Relations, with amendments:

S. 298. A bill to prevent nuclear proliferation in North Korea, and for other purposes.

EXECUTIVE REPORTS OF COMMITTEE

The following executive reports of nominations were submitted:

By Mr. LEAHY from the Committee on the Judiciary.