

forces and developed financial management infrastructure for the nation of Afghanistan.

Lieutenant Colonel Black was selected to serve as a congressional budget liaison officer in the Office of the Assistant Secretary of the Army for financial management and comptroller. She managed the Army's military personnel and operations and maintenance accounts, the Working Capital Fund, and activity at the depots and arsenals that support the Nation's organic industrial base, including Illinois' Rock Island Arsenal.

Lieutenant Colonel Black's leadership throughout her career has positively impacted her soldiers, peers, and superiors. As a budget liaison officer, she worked directly with the Senate and House Appropriations Committees to educate and inform Senators, Representatives, and staff for the United States Army.

Mr. President, on behalf of a grateful Nation, I thank and commend LTC Catherine Black for two decades of service to her country. I wish Catherine, her husband Geert Jacobs, and her sons Alexander, Achilles, and Elias all the best as they continue their journey of service. ●

VERMONT ESSAY WINNERS

● Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD finalist essays written by Vermont High School students as part of the Fourth Annual State of the Union Essay contest conducted by my office. These 9 finalists were selected from over 380 entries.

The essays follow:

CARLY NEELD, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 11 (FINALIST)

It is a great privilege to be a citizen of the United States. As citizens, we have a responsibility to ensure that our government is used to improve lives. Although this country has achieved much, there are many aspects that can be improved. In particular, we need to work towards reducing the unemployment rate and take meaningful steps to stop climate change. Addressing these two issues now will go a long way towards helping current and future generations.

The unemployment rate is at seven percent. It is our obligation, as a nation, to lower this rate. By lowering the unemployment rate, we could see a drop in crime and a reduction in poverty as more people are earning a steady income. Because of this steady income, there will be more tax revenue which could then support safety net programs that help the impoverished. An increased employment rate will also cause an increased access to health care and other necessities to living, strengthening families and communities.

In order to decrease the unemployment rate, there are things in our country that will need improvement and our support. Affordable childcare can benefit the employment rate, as it allows parents to be free to go to work. Access to higher education is also essential in increasing the employment rate, as more people will be able to obtain higher paying jobs or start businesses that create jobs. Quality public education, especially early childhood education, will build a strong workforce as jobs are created. It is important to acknowledge the small businesses that provide countless jobs and to ensure that the government is giving these

businesses the support they need to sustain their existence.

Climate change is a pressing issue the world is now facing and, as the United States, we need to lead the world in a greener direction. Carbon dioxide emissions are growing exponentially and are hurting our environment and our people's health. We need to take meaningful steps to reduce our carbon dioxide emissions and put our energy and resources into renewable energy technologies. Not only will the environment benefit, but we will benefit economically as the prices of energy will be stable and affordable.

These goals may be difficult to achieve; however, the result will benefit the country immensely and place us as a world leader in many aspects. These issues must be addressed, as they will improve the lives of every citizen and will allow us to strengthen our union.

REBECCA PAIGE, SOUTH ROYALTON SCHOOL, GRADE 12 (FINALIST)

The rising cost of a college education is becoming a chronic problem for everyone. We want everyone to become a well-educated, informed citizen, but are doing so at a steep price. We are paying an exorbitant amount of money and are being left with large amounts of debt.

For many families, having a high school senior in the household brings mixed feelings towards college. There is the excitement towards experiencing new things, but also the concern for how they will be able to afford a college education. The worries start right at the beginning, before the senior is even accepted. Having just finished my college application, I estimate that I paid about \$600 for application and testing fees. What do these fees do to help with post-secondary education? Nothing. These fees are being used as a gamble for the right to a college education. There is nothing saying that the applicant will be guaranteed admittance to college, only the chance of it. There should be a movement passed that will eliminate all application, testing, and other miscellaneous fees associated with the application process, so students have a chance to apply to the college they want without money to limit them in the pursuit of a higher education.

Even once students have been accepted to a college or university, the tuition should be lowered or subsidized by the government. Pursuing education beyond high school serves to help better society and, in turn, will help us out of the unstable state in which we find ourselves. There are many positive aspects about pursuing education beyond high school, but they are being outweighed by the financial repercussions of the decision to do so. This is not how the system should be run. We should not have to cringe at the word college; we should embrace it because of the plethora of opportunities that it will provide us.

There seems to be a double standard in this country. We want our citizens to pursue a higher education because the country will reap the benefits, yet we still limit the post-secondary education to those that can afford it and not let everyone have the opportunity to a higher education. There needs to be a change, if anything is going to move forward. Therefore, let all fees be eliminated, let there be lower tuition costs, and allow all people a chance for a college education without having to sign over their life in order to get one.

KENDALL SPAULDING, MISSISQUOI VALLEY UNION MIDDLE, HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 11 (FINALIST)

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts," said Winston Churchill. Churchill's quote links two controversial issues that our country is now facing, education and unemployment.

We have to think about the people in our state and their futures. How will they continue to succeed? If people want to continue seeking jobs, they must go through a schooling process in order for them to feel satisfied. We want to grow strong and protect our views, so, taking control of our future will make it stronger and brighter as a country. We have to start to address these topics first, so they won't become a failure, but a success for our country.

I believe education should be the government's biggest concern because of what it can push our nation to accomplish. We have to make the common core strong, so that students know what to expect. We cannot just give up after a failure, we have to be determined and think more about of our future. Marion Brady, who is a classroom teacher, asked, "What knowledge is absolutely essential for every learner?" His question is what we think the curriculum should be to everyone. I believe if any student is strong in a core of truly essential skills, they can succeed in anything they want in their future. I believe enforcing the common core will help achieve our goals and lead to courageous decisions.

Building a successful education program will begin to strengthen the unemployment rate in our country. I think benefits being extended isn't the right solution because there are so many opportunities to go towards to be successful. If the government chooses to extend the benefits, we would be spending billions of dollars in a short amount of time, which would not help our economy. We have to think about what's best for the individual, as well as the whole country. It's best if we continue to persevere by going to a job training facility to be more successful. Making no extensions would lead people to create a successful life on their own, gain confidence, and rely on only themselves. Leading people to search for a job is in their own hands and they need to have courage in order to succeed in life.

To conclude, our country has to continue to grow as a whole in order to solve the controversial issues. Making successful decisions can permanently change the way the country grows. Also, creating a confident country leads to less room for failure in the long run. Let's believe we can create a strong common core plan for education and a non-extendable unemployment plan. I believe it can be done, it just takes time and hard work to get them. Let these two topics not be an issue anymore and finally resolve them, so we all can grow to our best.

ERIC TUCKER, SPAULDING HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 11 (FINALIST)

The year 2013 was a period of progress and setback. The government was shut down for sixteen days, the unemployment rate decreased to seven percent, the lowest unemployment rate in five years, The Affordable Care Act (ObamaCare) was passed with mixed initial success, and many other influential achievements and failures occurred. A new year is here, and now is the time to further develop 2013's successes and solve its problems. The best way to turn 2014 into a year of achievement is to unite Americans and Congress by offering multiple solutions to common disagreements and by discovering a series of common goals with the support of the entire nation.

One of the catastrophically unsolved problems in 2013 was the gap between Republicans and Democrats in America. The government was shut down from October 1st to October 16th, and it nearly defaulted on its bills during this harsh debt-ceiling debate.

This could have been avoided, if multiple choices were offered during these debates. For example, the main reason the Republicans did not want to re-open the government is they strongly opposed the Democratic principle of a government-controlled health insurance system (ObamaCare). One compromise, which could have solved this dilemma, is making ObamaCare optional. This compromise never occurred because the Democrats wanted ObamaCare nationalized with a fine on those who did not enlist and the Republicans wanted complete abolishment. Middle ground must be reached.

Further connecting Congress and America will also help eliminate some of 2013's largest problems. Sometimes Congress is split because each Congressperson is acting on behalf of his or her voters. At other times, such as the government shutdown, Republicans and Democrats disagree on the best ways to solve a problem. If Congress and the White House listened to the public more, then America can help its leaders tackle America's most difficult problems. Utilize Facebook, utilize Twitter, utilize easy, accessible websites and conduct multiple surveys concerning many issues the country faces. Have America decide if the debt ceiling should be raised; have America decide if ObamaCare should be mandatory and existent; have America become one of the mediators of public dilemma. Stop having Republicans elect Republicans and Democrats elect Democrats; have Americans elect Americans.

Unification and success can also be created through generating nationally common goals. For example, the issue of clean energy is a project being half-heartedly tackled by the government. Turn 2014 into the year that the United States of America leads the world to a greener Earth. Begin the movement that creates 4.5 million jobs, stimulates the economy, and eliminates 1.2 billion tons of carbon emissions per year by 2030. This single goal can cause America to reap the benefits of economic stimulation, energy-efficiency, and national unification.

It is time for America to raise itself to new heights as a truly united nation. Allowing the public to help its leaders compromise and work on common goals will bring this country together. Now is the time to unite the United States of America.

MADISON GILLEY, MOUTH ABRAHAM UNION
MIDDLE, HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 9 (FINALIST)

There are many factors that impact our environment. Air pollution, deforestation, and climate change are just a few. These specific problems are caused by humans. We have a responsibility to our planet, ourselves, and to the other species that live here with us. Senator BERNIE SANDERS should take a stronger stance in protecting the environment because it is important to the state and the world.

Air pollution has a vast effect on climate change and the environment. In 2012 alone, the world produced 9.7 billion metric tons of CO₂ emissions (CO₂Now). All of the carbon emissions that go into the air cause climate change because the atmosphere traps the CO₂, which causes all the extra heat. The air, in many places, is not very clean because of air pollution and smog. Some factories use green energy so they do not put out as much pollution as other factories.

Deforestation, caused by logging, farming, mining, and development is also another immense problem that needs to be addressed. Rain forests are being cut down at an alarming rate. These rainforests need to be protected. Madagascar has lost 95% of its rainforests. Sumatra only has 15% of its rainforests left. The Atlantic coast of Brazil has lost 90-95% of its rainforest (Mongabay). Rainforests are important because they provide a habitat for plants and animals, they

regulate our climate, they help to prevent soil erosion, and they provide a home for indigenous people. BERNIE SANDERS needs to help protect the forests not just in Vermont, but all around the world.

Different environments around the world are in danger because of climate change. One way that climate change is caused is by carbon emissions. Air pollution causes climate change because when the air is polluted by all the CO₂ that we are producing, it damages the ozone layer. Climate change also affects forests which causes damage to the animal population and their homes. The earth isn't an unlimited supply; we need to use what we have carefully and conscientiously.

Senator BERNIE SANDERS should take a stronger stance in protecting the environment because climate change, deforestation and air pollution are major problems damaging our environment. These are all environmental issues that have social and economic impacts. We only have one planet and we need to use what we have carefully.

KYLEE DIMAGGIO, MISSISQUOI VALLEY UNION
HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 11 (FINALIST)

Barack Obama once said, "Change will not come if we wait for some other person or some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek." The American dream that many strive for is currently far out of reach for most. Our current economy is in such a dire state that some are even predicting another economic depression. This economic issue is vital to our future as a nation and impacts United States citizens directly. I also fear that if this issue is not addressed before long the consequences may be great. Fossil fuel usage (along with other things) have aided in the increase of unemployment rates in the United States and the poor economy. I believe that if the president were to focus on the state of the economy many other issues in the United States could be addressed as well.

Although I believe that many people blame the state of the economy on an excess of government spending, a huge expenditure of the government is in the subsidization of fossil fuels. Not only are fossil fuels harmful to the environment, but they are extremely costly. With the current economy, many citizens struggle to afford the prices of this resource. Furthermore, the large amount of dependence on fossil fuels leaves this resource an unreachable necessity. It is vital for the president to search for an alternative resource because fossil fuels are currently too costly for average citizens to afford. The president should be focused on finding an alternative resource for fossil fuels to decrease government spending and, in turn, improve the economy.

As a result of a poor economy, citizens are finding it hard to live comfortably and fulfill their ideas of the American dream. Government spending reduces the amount of money the government is able or willing to provide to the unemployed. Theodore Roosevelt said, "Behind the ostensible government sits enthroned an invisible government owing no allegiance and acknowledging no responsibility to the people." In saying this, Roosevelt infers that the president is not to blame, it is the politicians below him that do not allow him to make change. I believe that the government as a whole should be concerned with the outcome of such a poor economy. For example, jobs are extremely limited, leaving unemployment rates higher than the United States have seen in years. The unemployed are finding it hard to live comfortably on the current unemployment benefits. Therefore, the government, as a whole, should be focused on extending unemployment benefits to those in need. Citizens are suffering because of the poor economy and the government needs to take action to avoid this.

The United States economy must improve the state of our union. Government spending must also decrease to make room for citizens in need of assistance. Without government assistance the citizens turn against their government and grow unhappy. The United States should focus on decreasing government spending to improve the economy because without a stable economy, citizens suffer and the state of the union crumbles.

TREVOR MCNANEY, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE
12 (FINALIST)

Amidst not only our challenges in the past year, but in our progress as well, we as a nation have proved our unity and strength. We have confronted issues, such as gun control and gay marriage and have worked hard to figure out how to best deal with issues like these. We have proved ourselves as pioneers; we have explored the wonders of space and have developed amazing technologies new to the world. I ask the American people, with their strength and their unity, to confront an entirely different issue. One that is so intertwined with our lives and society, yet one that is so ignored. I ask the people to confront a world issue. Today, I ask that each and every individual of this nation to consider the impacts that our society has on the environment.

We as a nation have come to understand that in order to prosper, we need to work, produce, and consume with our earnings. Companies produce goods that are meant to be broken and thrown away so that consumers will simply buy more of their product. I argue that we are smarter. A society that values monetary gain at the demise and destruction of the environment is one that will not last. Without a healthy environment, we cannot have a healthy society. We are too scared to look at the destruction and pollution that we are causing as a society and as a global economic system. I ask what is more fearful, deciding to make progress today or ignoring the issues of tomorrow? Ignoring until there are no longer any issues to worry about, until the Earth itself has perished along with its inhabitants. Now is our gateway and foundation to the future. We must change the way we live in order to live.

The exciting possibility is that we can change. We hold more knowledge and resources than we ever have before. America, it is time that we put the environment first. It is time that we alter the way that we view and interact with the world around us. By 2026, every home needs a solar panel and seventy percent of the buildings we use need to use gray water. And by 2030, seventy-five percent of the transportation industry needs to use bio-fuels. By 2035, seventy percent of vehicles need to be electric and seventy percent of America needs to be powered by clean renewable energy and resources. Dismiss the idea that it cannot be done, that we as a society and the world cannot solve the problems that we have created. And most of all, dismiss the notion that "it is not your problem." The problems are here, they are real, and they are now. This world is our home, let's treat it like one.

EMIL KOENIG, VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL,
GRADE 12 (FINALIST)

This past year has posed many serious national security and foreign policy challenges for the United States. The nation encountered various issues like the Edward Snowden's NSA leaks, chemical weapons uses in the Syrian civil war, and a government closing. While all of these issues are

significant and have captured the headlines of the news media, we must also keep in mind the small issues that can potentially transform into global conflicts.

Currently, for example, one of the seemingly more exotic issues threatening world peace involves the disputed Diaoyu (or Senkaku) Islands in the South China Sea. Although these barren rocks might seem truly worthless, as they are uninhabited and lack natural resources, this fact did not stop China, Japan or South Korea from staking conflicting claims and angrily criticizing each other, escalating a small territorial issue into a potentially larger crisis. While China flaunts its growing dominance in the region, the South Koreans and Japanese reject Beijing's territorial claims.

In my conversations with various Chinese people during my last year studying abroad in Beijing, most people strongly sided with their government's territorial claims. In almost the same breath, they catalogued a long list of grievances from the turbulent history of Sino-Japanese relations. Many still vividly recalled earlier atrocities, such as the "Rape of Nanjing." When Japanese troops stormed Nanjing, raping women and burying people alive.

Chinese authorities play on these popular fears, disseminating propaganda that blames Japan for countless issues. Debates about truly useless ocean rocks, therefore, become conflated with deeply felt passions from the past, which is why it is important to understand the cultural and historical backgrounds of various conflicts in order to resolve them.

Because the situation now brewing in the South China Sea stems from deeply felt cultural and historical origins, the situation is extremely volatile. When the United States flew two bombers over the islands to demonstrate close ties with Japan, we may have raised the level of tension to a still higher level. Following the flights by our bombers, the Chinese, the Japanese, and the Koreans all sent planes to fly over the islands, to demonstrate their respective ownership claims over the islands.

As a nation, if we want to avoid potential wars, the government should consider more peaceful options, such as encouraging negotiations, before sending in war planes. The government must practice more diplomatic conversations with Chinese, Japanese and Korean partners in order to reduce the likelihood of war. Flying war planes over disputed islands never solves issues; it mainly risks causing more tensions.

In sum, to avoid international incidents, the United States must practice a more responsible system of foreign policy. The tension of the East Asian region is only one example of when America used force prior to engaging in other forms of international communication. Instead, the US government must assess historical and cultural backgrounds of various conflicts and first try to resolve them through peaceful means, rather than skyrocket the likelihood of starting wars.

ABIGAIL MORRIS, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION
HIGH SCHOOL, GRADE 11 (FINALIST)

Many United States issues have been the subject of attention from the media, citizens and officials. However, in my opinion the environmental issues in the US have not had their share of the spotlight. Small measures, whether involving policy or simple publicity, could change the US environment for the better. One of these measures is increased regulation of the fracking industry.

Hydraulic fracturing or "fracking" is the process of gathering oil by forcing highly pressurized fluid into oil or gas formations,

so that the oil or gas flows to the surface. The use of fracking has jumped to 25% of oil production, up from 1% in 2000. It has spurred hopes of an energy independent United States, but there are many drawbacks, especially where the environment is concerned. Fracking endangers plants, livestock, and most importantly, human beings. Refusal or reluctance to crack down on the fracking industry could seriously harm the health of the United States and its people. We must not let ourselves be lured by the economic benefits of fracking, and instead must examine it closely to determine if energy independence is worth the risk.

Of the 750 chemicals that can be used in fracking fluid, 29 are carcinogens. In Wyoming, Pennsylvania and other states, these chemicals have contaminated drinking water in residential areas. If there is no way to change the chemical makeup of fracking fluid or illegalize fracking completely, making sure the fracking industry is subject to strict regulation is the next best course of action.

Progress is being made, however. The FRAC (Fracturing Responsibility and Awareness of Chemicals) Act was introduced in 2011, which shows that the issue has caught the attention of Congress. However, both the House and Senate versions have yet to be passed. These bills need to be brought back to the attention of Congress, because as long as the fracking industry is not subject to the same regulation as every other, the natural environment and citizens of the United States will continue to be at risk.●

REPORT ON THE STATE OF THE UNION DELIVERED TO A JOINT SESSION OF CONGRESS ON JANU- ARY 28, 2014—PM 27

The PRESIDING OFFICER laid before the Senate the following message from the President of the United States, together with an accompanying report; which was ordered to lie on the table:

To the Congress of the United States:

Mr. Speaker, Mr. Vice President, Members of Congress, my fellow Americans:

Today in America, a teacher spent extra time with a student who needed it, and did her part to lift America's graduation rate to its highest level in more than three decades.

An entrepreneur flipped on the lights in her tech startup, and did her part to add to the more than eight million new jobs our businesses have created over the past 4 years.

An autoworker fine-tuned some of the best, most fuel-efficient cars in the world, and did his part to help America wean itself off foreign oil.

A farmer prepared for the spring after the strongest five-year stretch of farm exports in our history. A rural doctor gave a young child the first prescription to treat asthma that his mother could afford. A man took the bus home from the graveyard shift, bone-tired but dreaming big dreams for his son. And in tight-knit communities across America, fathers and mothers will tuck in their kids, put an arm around their spouse, remember fallen comrades, and give thanks for being home from a war that, after 12 long years, is finally coming to an end.

Tonight, this chamber speaks with one voice to the people we represent: it is you, our citizens, who make the state of our Union strong.

Here are the results of your efforts: The lowest unemployment rate in over 5 years. A rebounding housing market. A manufacturing sector that's adding jobs for the first time since the 1990s. More oil produced at home than we buy from the rest of the world—the first time that's happened in nearly 20 years. Our deficits—cut by more than half. And for the first time in over a decade, business leaders around the world have declared that China is no longer the world's number one place to invest; America is.

That's why I believe this can be a breakthrough year for America. After 5 years of grit and determined effort, the United States is better-positioned for the 21st century than any other nation on Earth.

The question for everyone in this chamber, running through every decision we make this year, is whether we are going to help or hinder this progress. For several years now, this town has been consumed by a rancorous argument over the proper size of the Federal Government. It's an important debate—one that dates back to our very founding. But when that debate prevents us from carrying out even the most basic functions of our democracy—when our differences shut down government or threaten the full faith and credit of the United States—then we are not doing right by the American people.

As President, I'm committed to making Washington work better, and rebuilding the trust of the people who sent us here. I believe most of you are, too. Last month, thanks to the work of Democrats and Republicans, this Congress finally produced a budget that undoes some of last year's severe cuts to priorities like education. Nobody got everything they wanted, and we can still do more to invest in this country's future while bringing down our deficit in a balanced way. But the budget compromise should leave us freer to focus on creating new jobs, not creating new crises.

In the coming months, let's see where else we can make progress together. Let's make this a year of action. That's what most Americans want—for all of us in this chamber to focus on their lives, their hopes, their aspirations. And what I believe unites the people of this Nation, regardless of race or region or party, young or old, rich or poor, is the simple, profound belief in opportunity for all—the notion that if you work hard and take responsibility, you can get ahead.

Let's face it: that belief has suffered some serious blows. Over more than three decades, even before the Great Recession hit, massive shifts in technology and global competition had eliminated a lot of good, middle-class jobs, and weakened the economic foundations that families depend on.