

converted to fields of corn and soybeans since 2006. Putting virgin land under cultivation has environmental consequences, including greater runoff, greater use of fertilizer, and less land available for conservation.

Another consequence of the corn ethanol mandate is that it places a regulatory requirement on oil refiners that cannot actually be satisfied—it requires more ethanol than the auto fleet and existing gas stations can accommodate, a concept called the blend wall. Under the RFS, oil refineries are required to blend 15 billion gallons of corn ethanol into the fuel supply in 2015. This far exceeds the roughly 13.5 billion gallons that our current infrastructure can accommodate. According to the Environmental Protection Agency's final 2013 rule, the "EPA does not currently foresee a scenario in which the market could consume enough ethanol to meet the volumes stated in the statute." The Congressional Budget Office confirmed this judgment in its June 2014 report, saying that the statutory goal of escalating corn ethanol volumes would be "very hard to meet in future years."

Chevron, which operates oil refineries in my home State, is also concerned that the statutory mandate requires too much ethanol. It is Chevron's judgment that "the required volume of renewable fuel exceeds the amount that can be safely blended into transportation fuels used by consumers." Facing this difficulty, the EPA has been unable to finalize the volume requirements for 2014 or 2015. This leaves the businesses seeking to develop advanced biofuel ventures without any certain prospects to guide their investments and undermines the primary purpose of the Renewable Fuel Standard.

The Corn Ethanol Mandate Elimination Act would address the blend wall directly, thereby allowing EPA to continue increasing volumes of low carbon advanced biofuel.

The corn industry, by contrast, does not depend on the RFS for its livelihood. In fact, the Congressional Budget Office predicts that refiners will continue to blend corn ethanol into the fuel supply in the absence of a mandate, because ethanol is the oil refiner's preferred octane booster and oxygenate.

Ultimately, I believe that this bill would better serve the advanced biofuel industry by removing the blend wall as an obstacle to the industry's expansion, and providing the regulatory certainty that they need to guide their investments. These advanced biofuels have none of the same problems as corn ethanol. They do not compete directly with food, and they reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 50 percent compared to petroleum.

I am also fundamentally committed to the vitally important public health and climate protections provided by the Clean Air Act. That is why I would like to make it crystal clear that this

legislation is a narrow bill repealing the corn ethanol mandate. The bill's language explicitly clarifies that the legislation has no effect on the low-carbon advanced biofuel provisions in the Renewable Fuel Standard, and I would oppose any bill that would amend, revise or weaken the advanced biofuel provisions or other public health protections provided by the Clean Air Act.

The elimination of the corn ethanol mandate is a smart, simple reform with support from the prepared food industry, the dairy, beef, and poultry industries, the oil and gas industries, hunger relief organizations, and environmental groups.

The bill solves the problems of the Renewable Fuel Standard while maintaining the provisions that encourage the development, growth, and deployment of cellulosic ethanol, algae-based fuel, biodiesel, and other low-carbon advanced biofuels.

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

JOHNSON CITY CHAMBER OF COMMERCE CENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

• Mr. ALEXANDER. Mr. President, this year marks the centennial year of the establishment of the Johnson City Chamber of Commerce.

Since its establishment on July 6, 1915, the chamber has served as the leading voice for local business and community development. The chamber has been instrumental in transforming Johnson City from a small rail-shipping town in the early 1900s to a distinguished medical community over the past several decades and continues to lead the way for new business, trade, and growth in upper East Tennessee.

As we see around the country, the Federal Government has been throwing a big, wet blanket of burdensome regulations on businesses and the economy, and chambers of commerce around the Nation have been leaders in advocating to get Washington out of the way and unleash our free enterprise system. The best thing we can do for job creation is to remove these regulations so businesses and entrepreneurs will be able to get our economy moving again.

We need to be working to help our job creators put people back to work, and we thank the Johnson City chamber for its work to help Tennessee businesses and employees, and for all it has done to help Johnson City succeed and continue to thrive.

With a new Republican majority, we will work with the chamber to advance our shared goals to jump-start our economy and liberate our free market so businesses in Tennessee and around the Nation will have the freedom they need to get our economy going in the right direction.●

VERMONT ESSAY WINNERS

• Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, since 2010 I have sponsored a State of the Union essay contest for Vermont students. The contest, now in its fifth year, is an opportunity for Vermont students to articulate what issues they would prioritize if they were President of the United States. A panel of Vermont teachers reviewed all of the essays submitted and selected the top twenty. I am proud to say that more than 400 students wrote essays for this year's State of the Union contest.

I would like to congratulate each and every finalist, and to specifically acknowledge Leo Lehrer-Small as this year's winner of the contest. I would also like to recognize Ryan Taggard for placing second and Craig Pelsor and Hadley Menk for placing third. I ask to have printed in the RECORD the winning essays.

The essays follow.

LEO LEHRER-SMALL, MOUNT MANSFIELD UNION HIGH SCHOOL (WINNER)

As we enter the year of 2015, there is one issue in particular that our government, in conjunction with global policy makers, need to address with attention and urgency. This issue, quite simply, is the safety of our planet: global climate change is already affecting the environment through droughts, increasingly frequent heat waves, and rising sea levels. It is a scientific fact that climate change is man-made, even though some politicians still deny the part that humans play in the issue.

As the most powerful country in the world, the US must be a driving force in halting global climate change. The question is: how do we go about doing this? In order to fix our growing crisis, we must first understand the roots of the problem. Last year's report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change showed that the recent rise of temperature is due to an excess of greenhouse gases that humans have released into our atmosphere. And to quote the Environmental Protection Agency, "The largest source of greenhouse gas emissions from human activities in the United States is from burning fossil fuels for electricity, heat, and transportation." So it is clear; the root of our problem is our overuse of fossil fuels.

We must take drastic measures to reduce our fossil fuel consumption. Congress must make and pass bills that finance green energy projects. Government subsidies which are currently being given to the oil and gas industries should be given to the renewable energy industry. This boost would allow renewable and clean energy sources such as wind and solar to provide more of the nation's energy, and in return lower our usage of fossil fuels. The growth of clean energy usage in the US would not only play a role in climate change reversal, but also provide millions of safe jobs for American workers.

Furthermore, our government should heavily tax the large greenhouse gas producers; companies that burn cheap fossil fuels to make massive amounts of money. These are the main contributors to climate change. These are the corporations that we must limit through a tax on carbon dioxide. Such a tax would not only discourage the burning of fossil fuels, but the money may also be invested in the redevelopment of clean energy.

And as one of the leaders in our global economy, the rest of the world will look to us to initiate the transition towards clean energy usage. We have the opportunity to

globally legitimize renewable energy, which is a vital step towards ending climate change. The action that our country takes on this problem will be a model for the rest of the world, which makes it the most important issue that should be addressed by the United States. Not taking care of the planet is not taking care of the people.

RYAN TAGGARD, BRATTLEBORO UNION HIGH SCHOOL (SECOND PLACE)

The state of our country has seen marked improvement over the last year. Unemployment is at its lowest level since before the recession, the stock market is setting record highs, and a manufacturing sector that has added jobs for the first time in nearly two decades. But we're working to regain lost ground, while neglecting the importance of innovating, creating, and aspiring—the very aspects that once made our country great.

Throughout the 60's and 70's, America was the planet's premier superpower. Despite the threat of an aggressive U.S.S.R. looming on the horizon, campus unrest, the conflict in Vietnam, and the civil rights movement playing out in confrontations on the street, we found time to dream about tomorrow. The engine of this growth was the relentless advancement of science and technology. Our crowned jewel, NASA, was among the most powerful agencies the world had ever seen, and promised us a future full of plenty. We didn't outsource jobs, because no other nation could do what America could. We spawned entire industries built around new inventions. And most importantly, we gained a technological edge, strengthening our military, infrastructure, and economy.

MRIs, GPS receivers, cochlear implants, Lasik surgery, catalytic converters, the first fuel cells, cordless tools, cell phones, and the microprocessors that enable our lives are all direct results of our first forays into the abyss of space. Due to our curiosity, hundreds of thousands of lives were saved. Patients who were born deaf were given the ability to hear. The blind could see. The environment was restored in numerous and invaluable ways, and communication became constant and universal. Curiosity enabled our nation to perform miracles.

Unfortunately for our nation, NASA was formed in the midst of a panic induced by the launch of the Soviet's Sputnik. Once the American government saw that the U.S.S.R. wasn't ready to go to the moon, they ceded their push to move forwards. Today NASA's spending represents 0.49% of our federal budget. This half a penny off the tax dollar pays for all of NASA's operations: the International Space Station, Hubble telescope, Curiosity rover, all the astronauts, and more. With only a slight increase in funding, we could go back to the moon, send men to Mars, and journey on to explore asteroids and alien worlds.

The incentives for raising NASA's budget are diverse, powerful, and irrespective of party. As well as providing an opportunity for our government to assume a leadership position, the economic stimulus that accompanies a revived space industry would create new jobs, the technologies developed would improve our lives, and the cultural shift that occurred in the 60's and 70's would once again become the norm. Students would aspire to become scientists, engineers, mathematicians, and technologists. We as a nation would reclaim our former spot at the very forefront of innovation. And America would reap the benefits of an educated, industrial, and forward thinking workforce.

HADLEY MENK, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL (THIRD PLACE)

The future of our great nation is being threatened at this very moment, and the foe may not be what you suspect. The current

states of our agricultural practices are harming our country's future in catastrophic ways. Before a country can focus on issues like health care, gun control, abortion, or even the functioning of its own government, it must make sure the people's basic needs are met. And nothing is more basic or essential than food.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization estimates that the world's population will reach 9 billion people within the next 40 years. To meet this need, global agricultural production must increase by 70%. Elected officials of the United States must take this seriously. Fortunately, agriculture is a subject in which Vermont is well versed. It is time for Vermont to lead the way in advocating for more efficient, effective, and sustainable agriculture. Investing in agriculture is one of the simplest but most effective ways for the United States to protect its future as a nation and as a world leader.

There are several interconnected issues currently facing our agriculture industry, the most important of which are affordability, water, and land management. Food prices tend to fluctuate depending on the price of oil, as petroleum products are widely used in almost all aspects of food production. From trucks and equipment to synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, petroleum plays too large a role in our food. Emphasis must be placed on finding more natural alternatives to petroleum. Water and land management are also major issues. As is evidenced by the crisis in California, more needs to be done in terms of finding ways to better conserve water for agriculture. According to the Index Mundi, in North America in 1961, the amount of arable land per person was 1.1 hectares. In 2009, that number had decreased to .61 per person, due to land misuse. Legislators on a local, state, and national level need to work with scientists to solve these potentially catastrophic problems.

Without agriculture, it is impossible for any country to survive. Widespread food shortages can cause not only starvation but also corruption in the government. Investing in food production benefits everyone, regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic status, or political party, and yet agriculture is not treated with as much attention as issues like gun control and immigration in the media.

In order to preserve the future of the United States, we as Vermonters must lead the way in urging legislators to endorse measures that will improve agricultural methods and help farmers be more sustainable. In a letter to George Washington dated August 14, 1787, Thomas Jefferson stated that "Agriculture . . . is our wisest pursuit, because it will in the end contribute most to real wealth, good morals and happiness."

CRAIG PELSOR, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL (THIRD PLACE)

The United States of America is without a doubt in a better position now than it was ten years ago. The economy has rebounded and the few lingering effects of the "Great Recession" are being mended. The national unemployment rate stands at 5.9% as of September, the lowest it's been since 2008. The United States is producing more oil, natural gas and energy from renewable resources than ever before, which seeks to further the eventual dream of an energy independent America. In addition, rates for violent and property crimes continue to decline and our national GDP continues to outpace every other nation.

Even with the future seeming so bright, there remains still pressing issues to which we must give our full attention.

As the economy has recovered and grown, so has the gap between the rich and the poor, and even the rich and the super-rich. We

hear of the wealthiest one percent's still growing fortunes while those in the 30th or 10th percentile are still waiting for the wealth to trickle down. That has not worked, and we must do something to stem the tide of this growing inequality. To do this we must raise the minimum wage until it is a livable wage in all fifty states, as well as reorganizing our tax structure so that those with the most wealth are contributing more than those without. There is also the issue of massive student loan debts which dampen the potential success of graduates. With the average student loan debt growing, there are a number of steps we could take to make paying for higher education less of a financial burden. Expand the federal student loan program to grant more money to those who need it, while at the same time ensuring public colleges and universities do not raise their tuitions. The system of federally subsidized Universities used in Canada and some Europeans nations could easily be adopted in the United States in order to keep the working costs of our colleges and universities at a level where they will not need to raise their tuition costs every year.

On a global front, there continues the troubles in the Middle East and abroad, for which America has a duty to respond with both humanitarian aid and military force to ensure a lasting peace in the region. The arming of so called "moderate" rebels in conflicts in Syria have proven of little aid to America or its interests as well as the weapons and intelligence we provide ending up in unintended hands. Also, the billions of dollars of military aid to countries such as Israel which has become a massively unnecessary expenditure. In light of this, America should adopt a renewed focus on bettering education opportunities and the general standards of living in the Middle East and avoid joining any new conflicts. The containment and destruction of ISIS should remain a top priority, although the commitment of ground troops to the area should be withheld unless the situation gets far worse.

A chasm of trust has grown between American citizens and those put in charge of their protection, law enforcement, due to a lack of transparency and discretion. To that end, the United States government must provide the states with incentive to equip local law enforcement with things such as body cameras instead of armored vehicles and assault rifles, as well as further training in dealing with the mentally ill and minorities where it is most needed. Until the people feel like police officers are being held accountable for their actions, we cannot expect to further improve the nation.

Another small change which may help stem the continuing rise in prescription drug abuse would be the outlawing of television, radio and internet advertising for all prescription drugs. With this people will be less likely to believe that they need all of the drugs that they see on television and that they are all safe because they are being publicly advertised.

There is no one solution to all the nation's problems, but through many small steps and congressional efforts like the ones that I have mentioned can make the United States of America a much stronger and prosperous nation.●

RECOGNIZING S&W WHOLESALE FOODS

- Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, one of the most important advantages of small businesses is their unparalleled devotion to their customers and communities. Small business owners are