

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 nations.

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 European 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

the most qualified to truly recognize and meet the needs of their local regions. Having a local presence can make all the difference when it comes to building up a community, providing essential goods and services, as well as giving back to those starting new ventures. For my second Small Business of the Week, I am honored to recognize S & W Wholesale Foods for its success and commitment to serving southeast Louisiana and parts of the Mississippi Gulf Coast.

Family owned and operated, Frank Spalitta and Richard Willams opened S & W Wholesale Foods in 1978. Over the years, it has grown from a 5,000 square foot operation to two locations in Hammond, LA, and Baton Rouge, LA. While S & W Wholesale Foods is well-known for distributing fresh food products such as meats, seafood, and produce, it also stocks complementary supplies, including plasticware, chemical and cleaning supplies, and paper products to surrounding restaurants, bakeries, childcare centers, convenience stores, and other local businesses. When Frank retired in 2006, his son and daughter-in-law, Paul and Tiffany Spalitta, purchased the business in order to keep the family tradition alive.

S & W Wholesale Foods has made a commitment to provide the best available products to its customers, while also supporting an environment in which local restaurants and businesses work together to succeed. As a shareholder in one of the largest foodservice distribution cooperatives, Unipro Foodservice, S & W Wholesale Foods is able to supply high-quality products and services for its customers, which in turn supply Louisianians and residents of the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Even more inspiring is that S & W Wholesale Foods incorporates Louisiana brands, including New Orleans Roast and Zatarain's, to its larger product base. One of the more unique aspects of the company is the quarterly brochure that shares seasonal recipes and localized tips and ideas to help readers build up and maintain their own businesses.

S & W Wholesale Foods is a great example of how hard work and quality products can lead to a successful small business. The company's motto truly sums up the undeniable foundation of its priorities, "Large Enough to Serve . . . Small Enough to Care." It is my honor to recognize this company that works so diligently to promote the businesses of the customers they serve. Once again, I congratulate S & W Wholesale Foods for being recognized as this week's "Small Business of the Week" and wish them all of the best in the future. ●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mr. Pate, 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.)

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 9:38 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, 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. 37. An act to make technical corrections to the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, to enhance the ability of small and emerging growth companies to access capital through public and private markets, to reduce regulatory burdens, and for other purposes.

H.R. 185. An act to reform the process by which Federal agencies analyze and formulate new regulations and guidance documents.

H.R. 240. An act making appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2015, and for other purposes.

MEASURES REFERRED

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

H.R. 37. An act to make technical corrections to the Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, to enhance the ability of small and emerging growth companies to access capital through public and private markets, to reduce regulatory burdens, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

H.R. 185. An act to reform the process by which Federal agencies analyze and formulate new regulations and guidance documents; to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

The following bill was read the second time, and placed on the calendar:

H.R. 33. An act to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to ensure that emergency services volunteers are not taken into account as employees under the shared responsibility requirements contained in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

MEASURES READ THE FIRST TIME

The following bill was read the first time:

H.R. 240. An act making appropriations for the Department of Homeland Security for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2015, and for other purposes.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS AND JOINT RESOLUTIONS

The following bills and joint resolutions were introduced, read the first

and second times by unanimous consent, and referred as indicated:

By Mrs. GILLIBRAND (for herself and Mr. PAUL):

S. 180. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to provide an above-the-line deduction for child care expenses, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. MORAN (for himself, Mr. WARNER, Mr. COONS, Mr. BLUNT, Ms. KLOBUCHAR, and Mr. Kaine):

S. 181. A bill to jump-start economic recovery through the formation and growth of new businesses, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. ROBERTS (for himself, Mr. GRASSLEY, Mr. INHOFE, and Mr. PORTMAN):

S. 182. A bill to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 to prohibit Federal education mandates, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mr. BARRASSO (for himself, Mr. HATCH, Mr. ALEXANDER, Ms. AYOTTE, Mr. BLUNT, Mr. BURR, Mr. COATS, Mr. CRAPO, Mrs. FISCHER, Mr. FLAKE, Mr. GARDNER, Mr. INHOFE, Mr. ISAKSON, Mr. KIRK, Mr. MORAN, Mr. ROBERTS, Mr. RUBIO, Mr. SCOTT, Mr. TOOMEY, Mr. VITTER, and Mr. WICKER):

S. 183. A bill to repeal the annual fee on health insurance providers enacted by the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. HOEVEN (for himself and Mr. TESTER):

S. 184. A bill to amend the Indian Child Protection and Family Violence Prevention Act to require background checks before foster care placements are ordered in tribal court proceedings, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Indian Affairs.

By Mr. HATCH (for himself and Mr. BENNET):

S. 185. A bill to create a limited population pathway for approval of certain antibacterial drugs; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

By Mrs. FISCHER (for herself, Mr. BLUNT, Mr. BOOZMAN, and Mr. INHOFE):

S. 186. A bill to improve transparency and efficiency with respect to audits and communications between taxpayers and the Internal Revenue Service; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. MARKEY (for himself, Mr. WHITEHOUSE, and Mr. MERKLEY):

S. 187. A bill to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to clarify that products derived from tar sands are crude oil for purposes of the Federal excise tax on petroleum, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

By Mr. MARKEY:

S. 188. A bill to ensure that oil transported through the Keystone XL pipeline into the United States is used to reduce United States dependence on Middle Eastern oil; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

SUBMISSION OF CONCURRENT AND SENATE RESOLUTIONS

The following concurrent resolutions and Senate resolutions were read, and referred (or acted upon), as indicated:

By Mr. MCCONNELL (for himself and Mr. REID):

S. Res. 27. A resolution to authorize testimony and representation in United States of America v. Jeffrey A. Sterling; considered and agreed to.