

the Medal of Honor or, as determined by the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, otherwise performed military service of an extraordinarily distinguished character;

(2) A Member of the United States House of Representatives or Senate who had a direct association with such facility;

(3) An Administrator of Veterans' Affairs, a Secretary of Veterans Affairs, a Secretary of Defense or of a service branch, or a military or other Federal civilian official of comparable or higher rank; or

(4) An individual who, as determined by the Chairman and Ranking Minority Member, performed outstanding service for veterans.

(B) Each Member of the Congressional delegation representing the State in which the designated facility is located must indicate in writing such Member's support of the proposal to name such facility after such individual. It is the policy of the Committee that sponsoring or cosponsoring legislation to name such facility after such individual will not alone satisfy this requirement.

(C) The pertinent State department or chapter of each Congressionally chartered veterans' organization having a national membership of at least 500,000 must indicate in writing its support of such proposal.

IX. AMENDMENTS TO THE RULES

The rules of the Committee may be changed, modified, amended, or suspended at any time provided, however, that no less than a majority of the entire membership so determine at a regular meeting with due notice or at a meeting specifically called for that purpose. The rules governing quorums for reporting legislative matters shall govern rules changes, modification, amendments, or suspension.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

VERMONT ESSAY FINALISTS

• Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD finalist essays written by Vermont High School students as part of the Fifth Annual "What is the State of the Union" Essay contest conducted by my office. These 20 finalists were selected from over 400 entries.

The essays follow.

LIAM GIBBONS, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

We learn in school and from our parents that America is the land of opportunity. Yet that is not the case. When the wealth gap is steadily increasing, as women earn 70 cents for each dollar a man makes, as the U.S. government spends more on defense than on its disenfranchised, the land of opportunity seems no longer under boot, but instead a distant reality. Equal protection under the laws for every citizen, promoting the general welfare, rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. All of these things are printed on our country's most sacred documents, these things which need to be an attainable reality for every American.

Perhaps one of the most egregiously neglected groups in the U.S. is women. Wage inequality combined with the control of their own bodies in the hands of the government all add to the fact that women are among the most disparaged people within the U.S. Throughout America, women are denied the right to a safe and constitutional abortion. Some of the biggest contenders for the presidency have voiced their belief that women shouldn't have this constitutional right even in the context of rape or incest. Because of *Roe v. Wade*, because of its con-

stitutionality, a safe abortion should be as accessible to the women in Texas as much as the women in Vermont.

A law needs to standardize how abortion clinics are made and run, and if there is an issue regarding states' rights and federalism, then an amendment must be made. Because not only are women not currently in control of their own bodies, they also lack the ability to earn equal wages as men. In 1977, the Equal rights amendment lost by the votes of three states. Who in their right minds would vote against equal rights in 2015. In order to ensure true equality and civil rights bring back the ERA, and this time ratify it.

Another group of people who lack this promised opportunity is the poor. Most Americans are employed, but many of them aren't earning livable wages. An American shouldn't have to work three jobs to support their family. An American shouldn't have to ride a bus three hours a day in order to work for privatized welfare. An American should be able to work for 40 hours a week, and be able to live comfortably. And this is possible if we raise the minimum wage so that it equates to a livable wage. However, no American should not have to strive for the minimum, each citizen should have a chance at exceeding, each American should be able to go to college.

In Germany, in Sweden, in Norway college is free. In Syria, a week of bombing by the U.S. costs the same as the tuition of 40,000 American students. If we were to take a fraction of our defense budget and give it to the impoverished for higher education, if we were to reallocate the budget, we would be seeing a lot more opportunity.

ELI HULSE, VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL (FINALIST)

As the United States moves into 2015, we have achieved many things that have furthered the nation, and improved the security of the people economically, socially, and militarily. Some of these advancements include electing Janet Yellen as the first female Chair of the Federal Reserve, reducing the unemployment rate from 6.7 percent to 5.8 percent; the lowest it has been since 2008, and helping foreign forces fight against the militant group ISIS. However, there are many problems that the United States faces and needs to address over the next year.

The single most important issue that the United States needs to recognize and correct is the disparity of income. Although it is true that the gap in income causes problems with equality between the social classes, there are concerns that the percentage of income that the upper class has is causing instability in the United States economy as a whole. People who have more money do not spend as much of percentage of it as poorer people, which means that that money sits in savings accounts, and is not paid to businesses in return for products. As the income gap widens, less money will be introduced into the economy, and it will leave the economy in a precarious position.

Another serious issue that the United States needs to address is the spread of Ebola in Africa. Although domestic cases of Ebola have been isolated and treated, an unstable Africa would allow Ebola to potentially spread to the United States and other countries, and could be catastrophic. It is important that the United States government continues its support of Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and other countries that are struggling to create the infrastructure to treat this deadly disease.

Finally, it is key that the United States continues its resistance to terror threats both domestically and internationally. Although currently not a direct threat to the United States or to the general populous,

ISIS has the potential to cause great damage to the European Union and eventually to the United States. A military force this size has not been seen in a long time, and the influence that it has in the countries it overtakes is alarming and needs to be kept in check. The United States needs to keep this in mind when making international policy decisions, and needs to continue supporting countries that are actively fighting ISIS.

The United States continues to be one of the largest influencers on the international playing field. However, policy makers need to keep in mind many domestic problems, and begin working across the aisle in order to keep the government of the United States secure and capable. 2014 has seen a whole array of new policies, and these policies have ensured the security of the American people. In 2015, new policies will be created, that will hopefully fix some of the problems in our society. God bless the United States of America.

KATHY JOSEPH, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

America has undoubtedly grown in the past year, but the many problems plaguing our nation continue to persist. The United States economy is stronger. We added 300 thousand jobs in November, the best in nearly three years. The unemployment rate is at 5.8%, a post-recession low point. President Obama struck a climate change deal with China—the two countries with the largest energy consumptions agreed to curb their carbon emissions by 2030. The war on terror in Afghanistan officially ended. Relations with Cuba have been reopened, which will make educational travel to Cuba easier and is a new approach to dealing with the oppressive regime that is currently leading Cuba.

All of these are steps America has taken in the past year in the right direction. However, we still face many challenges. The US has a growing income gap—the rich are getting richer while the poor are getting poorer. This is highlighted in the spending bill passed in December to prevent the government shutdown. In it there were several provisions to cut welfare spending, such as Medicare and spending on the Women and Children support while there was another provision essentially written by the banks to reverse the Dodd Frank act. That act was written after the recession, but now things will go back to the way they were. Lobbyists for banks and for the wealthy have louder voices in Washington. Over 50% of Congress people are millionaires, while millionaires make up only 5% of the US population. This helps explain why income inequality is only getting worse, and is something that the American people must change.

It is harder for students to afford college. Student loans are not of importance in Washington, which is something that needs to be changed. More people are afraid of the debt they will be in after getting their degree, and would rather start working out of high school. This is not the path we should be going on, and it is time for Congress to start listening to the students and prioritizing education.

The media have recently brought the nation's attention to police brutality, racial discrimination, and our broken criminal justice system. President Obama allocated \$263 million for police body cameras and training, which is an acknowledgement of the need for reform but does not solve the root problem. Although there was footage available for the strangling of Eric Garner, the officer had no charges filed against him. These injustices seem to be occurring only more frequently, and Congress should focus its attention on real solutions that will lead to demilitarization of the police and a stop to the criminal

justice system disproportionately affecting minority groups.

We are still moving forward as a nation, but in 2015 we must work to reverse trends such as the growing income gap, increased police brutality, and losing sight of our priorities. There is still hope for a brighter future if we remember what values America really stands for.

EMILY (EMERY) MEAD, MISSISQUOI VALLEY
UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

As a young Vermonter, just getting ready to begin my college journey, there are some concerns that trouble me most about the future of our country. Please consider my advice as you prepare your address on the state of our union. My main concern is about how the transgender community is treated in America. Things have gotten better for them, but there's still quite a bit of discrimination against transgender people. Many people don't think trans folk deserve rights, but they're still just humans. I am a part of this community so I know about its difficulties personally. I am physically female but I identify as male.

One of the difficulties I have is the bathrooms and I'm not the only one, it's one of the biggest problems for us. I am literally terrified to go to the bathroom at school and in other public places because I use the men's bathroom and every time I do I'm afraid I will be ridiculed or kicked out and have been confronted by kids telling me to stay out of the guys bathroom at school. No one should be afraid to pee.

I don't have it that bad, for some people it's a lot worse. A friend of mine came out as transgender to his family and they kicked him out and disowned him. Luckily he has a very supporting girlfriend who he's currently living with and good friends who helped him with his struggles. Some people don't have that kind of support. Some are kicked out of their houses or run away from abusive families to live on the dirty streets and beg for money to pay for food or to buy a blanket to keep them warm on cold nights. An article about gay and transgender youth homelessness on americanprogress.org gives these stats which I have paraphrased; There is an estimated 1.6 million to 2.8 million homeless youth in the United States; 20 to 40 percent of that are gay or transgender kids; an estimated 320,000 to 400,000 gay and transgender youth are facing homelessness each year. Some are lucky enough to find a shelter or housing for transgender people, but not everyone lives near one or knows about one near them. It's not right for these kids to have no place to sleep.

These problems are very serious and need to be addressed and fixed. A possible solution for the bathroom problem is to fund more unisex bathrooms in more public places; I strongly believe this will help reduce the awkwardness and fear of going to the bathroom; even for those who are just uncomfortable with using public bathrooms. As for the shelter problem, putting more of these shelters around the country and making them more advertised and well known these kids won't be forced to live on the streets anymore.

Thank you for your consideration.

ALICIA MUIR, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

As a global powerhouse, the United States is bestowed with a responsibility. This country stands upon its obligation and ability to be innovative, to provide opportunity and to maintain a respectable quality of living for every citizen. I would like to take this moment to address where we stand on these principles and how far we still have to go.

In our current state, economic problems are most apparent. While the economy rests in a steady stage of recovery, many of our

neighbors struggle to obtain and secure an adequate standard of living. We can try to justify yearly improvement by pointing out that unemployment rates and gas prices are down. But despite such progress, the standard of living is always increasing. Paired with this fact is the abundant number of citizens who struggle to survive on a wage that is not livable. The obvious action to take is to raise the federal minimum wage, which has been set at \$7.25 since 2009. For a single person working 40 hours a week, the basic costs of food, housing, medical care, utilities, and other necessary expenses should be attainable with the lowest margin of pay. As of now, it is not. Starting in 2015, many states have already decided to raise their minimum wage. If we increase the pay benchmark on the federal level, every state will have to do the same.

When high school graduates are launched into adulthood, college is the promising route that comes with a discouraging debt sentence. Higher education is needed to be competitive in the job market. Rather than pouring mass amounts of money into defense spending and other well budgeted programs, legislators should create a larger budget for student loans and grants. I urge the United States to make college more accessible. In addition to the budget, the federal government can offer incentives for universities that will encourage them to administer greater financial aid packages and cut tuition costs. Specific criteria can even be established to provide free education to certain financial groups based on their low incomes.

Transitioning to a problem that is often neglected, I believe that as a country we must address the gender wage gap. To this day, a vast majority of women make on average only 75% of what men make. First, the United States has to establish a paid pregnancy leave at the standard of other industrialized nations. This will allow women to balance earning a sustainable income and raising a family. We can also regulate companies that retaliate against workers who discuss their wages, as well as increase the limitations on gender based pay discrimination. It's time to finally stop employers from paying less for equal work. Let us break down the glass ceiling.

To affirm that these programs will take place, and that these solutions will triumph, it is vital that the Congress disregards the party polarization that has crippled the government for so long. With collaboration and determination, the United States can prosper and prevail.

CURTIS RICHARDSON, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL
(FINALIST)

My country, our country, is something I love and wish that everyone within its borders receives the highest amount of happiness possible and lives a life well fed and secure.

With that said an issue not talked about as much as it should. Homelessness. People spend their nights in cold dark alleyways covered only by the warmth of the Sunday paper. Shelters are full, stomachs empty. There are children who are homeless. There should never be a child without a warm place to sleep. By enacting programs which employ the homeless, and renovating buildings that serve no purpose, transforming them into shelters and low income housing we can find a solution to this problem and make sure that every American does not have to worry where they are going to sleep.

The poverty level in the United States is at 14.5 percent 42,000,000 Americans. A percentage that is entirely too high. A percentage of those Americans may work well over 40 hours a week, put in overtime and are yet

still unable to rise above the poverty level. This is because the national minimum wage is at \$7.25. The minimum wage is not a livable wage. By raising the national minimum wage to over \$10 we can make sure that those hard working Americans are not living below the poverty line.

There is always a need for jobs in America. Many jobs are being outsourced for big business to make more money. By federally regulating how much a company can outsource jobs from America we can make companies open more factories in America and by doing so will open the way for more jobs spread throughout these United States.

While there are many domestic issues that are very important there are international ones as well. With the terrorist group Isis still at large we must ensure the security of citizens in the United States and places overseas. That is why we will have troops ready to be deployed. As long as there is a terrorist presence we will protect the people of the United States and its allies.

Bees are needed in order to pollinate flowers and grow many of the foods we eat. The bees are dying off and without them many of the foods we eat will increase in price and will deplete. Opening bee farms in America and increasing the bee population we can save many crops and flowers that the bees greatly assist with, and the federal government would also be assisting those small bee farmers who may be running low on business and this will be supporting the hard working Americans and not big business.

This cannot be accomplished alone. It will take the country as a whole cooperating with one another to make everything here into a reality. Working past party lines and finding an answer that's the best solution will ensure that these problems are solved.

FRIEDEMANN SCHMIDT, BRATTLEBORO UNION
HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

Under the presidency of Ronald Reagan the United States turned within four years from the biggest creditor nation in the world in 1981 to the world's largest debtor in 1985. Supported by numerous foreign assignments of the U.S. Armed forces, the public debt increased constantly, reaching a figure of \$18 trillion in recent years. This is a very serious issue for the United States not only because it deepens the dependence on creditor nations like China or Saudi Arabia which neglect values like freedom and equality, but also it directly affects everyone.

In 2013 the interest payments of the U.S. public debt made up 6% of the federal budget excluding an actual debt reduction. With a steadily growing budget deficit, primarily due to outrageous defense spending, that figure will even form a larger part of the annual budget plan. Presumably that will lead to cuts in secondary areas like education, transportation and social as well as scientific endeavors. This symbolizes a threat to the belief of the founding fathers in equality and perhaps makes a myth of the United States offering fair chances for everyone, regardless of status.

By decreasing the governmental funding of social programs, like the free/reduced meal program offering meals to 20% of food insecure students in Vermont, the living status of numerous hard-working middle and lower class would drop. A declining federal funding of universities and colleges throughout the country would further increase the college tuition for individuals, creating an unaffordable higher education for hundreds of thousands of young, talented Americans—a problem America already faces.

The social injustice created by enlarging the gap between rich and poor, would weaken the unity of the United States as much as decreasing the funding of America's world-

leading role in science and innovation, the key to economic success and human progress itself. Former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich states that due to the fact that “Inequality has become worse, the danger to the economy and democracy had become worse.”

The public debt will be one of the major challenges for United States politics in the near future. Facing it will have to lead to changes of American policies and its lead in world policy. Priorities have to be set and compromises have to be made. Martin Luther King Jr. once said: “A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death.” It is the responsibility of every U.S. citizen to prevent that in order to maintain the prosperity and values for which America stands.

SOPHIA SEMAN, ESSEX HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

As our nation ages and evolves, the problems it faces become more complex. Some of the greatest challenges we face today are those of police brutality, a flawed naturalization process, and the daunting cost of higher education.

In the past few months, cities in the US have erupted in protests over police brutality. Starting in Ferguson, marching feet have spread to New York and California. One solution to the spreading mistrust in law enforcement is the use of body cameras that would provide an account of each interaction. While many speculate that this would be an invasion of privacy, the departments that have tested these devices decided the benefits outweigh the risks. Rialto, CA has seen a “60 percent reduction in officer use of force incidents following camera deployment” and an “88 percent reduction in number of citizen complaints”. The federal government should issue categorical grants to any department that opts to implement the use of this technology. The cost to supply all the law enforcers with cameras may seem too high, but eventually, the money saved in lawsuits would counter the initial pay out.

This year, college students returned to school with considerably lighter pockets, as state tuition climbed another 2.9 percent. While many politicians realize the need for a highly educated work force for the future economy, few are willing to throw their weight behind the necessary reforms to make it more affordable. If young adults are expected to pay their way through college, they must have viable options in student loans. Unfortunately, “private college loans are much cheaper than federal student loans now”. It is the responsibility of our government to help budding adults pay for higher education and mold themselves into conscientious citizens by lowering federal interest rates on loans.

The US has always been a nation of immigrants. However it is the unfortunate American tradition that the newest wave of immigrants is detested by those who have formed roots. Today it is the Latinos who face a wave of prejudice. As much as it pains some lawmakers to admit, we need the fresh faces and new ideas as much as these prospective citizens need refuge from the turmoil of their home country. It is time for a renovation of the naturalization process. Because the US does not have an official language and many new citizens site English as “one of the biggest obstacles”, the English portion of the test should be eliminated. Questions pertaining to civil rights should be emphasized on the Civics Test, rather than superfluous ones about history, as citizens should be more aware of their rights and responsibilities than the War of 1812.

The most pressing issues facing the Union today are those of police brutality, rising

college and university costs and the labyrinthine naturalization process. They demand quick, effective solutions, such as police-worn cameras, lowered interest rates on student loans, and a revised naturalization test.●

REPORT ON THE CONTINUATION OF THE NATIONAL EMERGENCY THAT WAS ORIGINALLY DECLARED ON JANUARY 23, 1995, WITH RESPECT TO FOREIGN TERRORISTS WHO THREATEN TO DISRUPT THE MIDDLE EAST PEACE PROCESS—PM 2

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

To the Congress of the United States:

Section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)) provides for the automatic termination of a national emergency unless, within 90 days prior to the anniversary date of its declaration, the President publishes in the *Federal Register* and transmits to the Congress a notice stating that the emergency is to continue in effect beyond the anniversary date. In accordance with this provision, I have sent to the *Federal Register* for publication the enclosed notice stating that the national emergency declared with respect to foreign terrorists who threaten to disrupt the Middle East peace process is to continue in effect beyond January 23, 2015.

The crisis with respect to grave acts of violence committed by foreign terrorists who threaten to disrupt the Middle East peace process that led to the declaration of a national emergency on January 23, 1995, has not been resolved. Terrorist groups continue to engage in activities that have the purpose or effect of threatening the Middle East peace process and that are hostile to United States interests in the region. Such actions continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States. Therefore, I have determined that it is necessary to continue the national emergency declared with respect to foreign terrorists who threaten to disrupt the Middle East peace process and to maintain in force the sanctions against them to respond to this threat.

BARACK OBAMA.

THE WHITE HOUSE, January 21, 2015.

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, and were referred as indicated:

EC-298. A communication from the Congressional Review Coordinator, Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Department of Agriculture, transmitting, pursuant to

law, the report of a rule entitled “Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia; Interstate Movement and Import Restrictions on Certain Live Fish” (Docket No. APHIS-2007-0038) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 16, 2015; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC-299. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Review Group, Farm Service Agency, Department of Agriculture, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled “Marketing Assistance Loans, Loan Deficiency Payments, and Sugar Loans” (RIN0560-AI28) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 15, 2015; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC-300. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Review Group, Farm Service Agency, Department of Agriculture, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled “Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Age in Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance From the U.S. Department of Agriculture” (RIN0503-AA57) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 14, 2015; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC-301. A communication from the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense (Reserve Affairs), transmitting, pursuant to law, the National Guard Youth Challenge Program 2014 annual report; to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC-302. A communication from the Chief Executive Officer of the Armed Forces Retirement Home, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to a real estate lease transaction; to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC-303. A communication from the Assistant Director, Senior Executive Management Office, Department of Defense, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to a vacancy in the position of Assistant Secretary of Defense (Strategy, Plans, and Capabilities), Department of Defense, received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 14, 2015; to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC-304. A communication from the Assistant Director, Senior Executive Management Office, Department of Defense, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to a vacancy in the position of Assistant Secretary of Defense (Logistics and Material Readiness), Department of Defense, received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 14, 2015; to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC-305. A communication from the Assistant Director for Regulatory Affairs, Office of Foreign Assets Control, Department of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled “Cuban Assets Control Regulations” (31 CFR Part 515) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 15, 2015; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-306. A communication from the Assistant Secretary for Export Administration, Bureau of Industry and Security, Department of Commerce, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled “Russian Sanctions: Licensing Policy for the Crimea Region of Ukraine” (RIN0694-AG43) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 15, 2015; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-307. A communication from the Under Secretary for Industry and Security, Department of Commerce, transmitting, pursuant to law, a Foreign Policy Report on the imposition of a license requirement on exports,