

his past year of exemplary dedication to duty and service as an Army congressional liaison for the Chief of Army Reserve. In that role, he managed the operations and readiness portfolio for the Army Reserve. I am grateful that he will continue to serve the Army and Congress in his new assignment as commander, 361st Civil Affairs Brigade, in Kaiserslautern, Germany. We wish him well in his new position.

A native of Ohio, Colonel Novak enlisted in the Army as a psychological operations specialist in the 21st Psychological Operations Company, Cleveland, OH. He graduated with honors from John Carroll University, magna cum laude, and the Reserve Officer Training Corps Program, distinguished military graduate, in 1991 and was commissioned into the infantry. Throughout his career, he also earned a master's degree in business and organizational security management from Webster University; a master's degree in legislative affairs from the George Washington University; a master's degree in strategic intelligence from the National Intelligence University, Defense Intelligence Agency; a master's degree in strategic studies from the U.S. Army War College; and associate of arts degrees in Russian studies and law enforcement.

As an officer in the U.S. Army Reserve, Colonel Novak served with military intelligence, logistics, psychological operations, and civil affairs units at the platoon, detachment, company, battalion, group, and major command level as an executive officer, platoon leader, detachment commander, psychological operations officer, Product Development Center chief, logistics officer, assistant operations officer, S3, company commander, plans officer, operations officer, aide-de-camp, assistant chief of staff, and battalion commander.

His service in the Army Reserve is highlighted by his selection in 2009 to serve as an Army congressional fellow. While assigned to the Office, Chief of the Army Reserve from 2010 to 2012, Colonel Novak spent a year representing the Army to the Congress by working in the office of Senator Saxby Chambliss. Following the completion of battalion command, he returned once again to the Office, Chief Army Reserve to serve as a legislative liaison officer.

As with all our citizen soldiers, it is important that we acknowledge his service in the civilian sector. Colonel Novak has extensive law enforcement experience, serving as both a municipal police officer in Ohio and as a Federal civilian special agent with the U.S. Air Force Office of Special Investigations. It is because of their cooperation and understanding during his many tours on Active Duty that he is able to make such a positive impact on the Army Reserve.

John is accustomed to working long hours in all of his positions in the Army and civilian sector, so it is only

fair and proper to acknowledge the tireless support of his wife Stacey and his children—Patrick John Novak and Caitlin Lynn Novak. I thank them for their sacrifices and wish them all the best for continued success in the future.

Throughout his 30-year career, COL John Novak has made positive impacts on the careers and lives of his soldiers, peers, and superiors; and I am grateful that he has chosen to serve as an Army leader. I join my colleagues today in honoring his dedication to our Nation and invaluable service to the U.S. Congress as an Army congressional liaison.●

#### TRIBUTE TO DAVID W. SCHEIBLE

● Mr. PERDUE. Mr. President, I wish to honor a great Georgian, David W. Scheible, chairman and CEO of Graphic Packaging International, Inc. David is retiring from Graphic Packaging after a decade of transforming the company.

Under David's leadership, Graphic Packaging has grown to become a Fortune 500 company with over 12,000 employees globally and a highly respected leader in the paper and packaging industry.

Last year, David was the recipient of the Executive Papermaker of the Year award, which is based on corporate vision, strategic objectives, and strong leadership within the individual's company and the paper industry.

David is also a pillar in our community with a passion for education, sustainability, and feeding the hungry. He serves on the board of directors of Benchmark Electronics, the board of Cancer Treatment Centers of America, and the Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce, where he was chairman of the education committee for the last 5 years.

As the immediate past chairman of the American Forest & Paper Association, David was a powerful and visionary advocate working with Federal, State, and local officials on issues critical to the pulp and paper industry. David's charisma, focus, and quick intellect earned the respect of many legislators, including myself.

It is with great pleasure that I recognize David Scheible, a man who continues to make a difference, and I wish him well in his future endeavors.●

#### VERMONT ESSAY FINALISTS

● Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD copies of some of the finalist essays written by Vermont High School students as part of the sixth annual "What is the State of the Union" essay contest conducted by my office. These finalists were selected from nearly 800 entries.

The material follows:

ADAM FLEISCHMAN, SOUTH BURLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

The state of the union is strong. Americans are working hard, unemployment is down, the stock market is up, and the reces-

sion of 2008 feels like ancient history. Still, we face problems. Climate change is one of those issues, particularly because of the denial by politicians in our government that refuse to do anything, because their re-election campaigns rely on oil and gas companies' contributions.

In the 114th congress, 170 members deny that global warming is real. Many representatives receive huge donations, as much as \$63 million from big oil and gas companies, and in return, they support deregulation initiatives in Congress to protect the corporations. In other words, they prevent progress and obstruct a move away from non-renewable energy sources. In this way, they are not representing their constituents—they're representing the interests of the very wealthy corporations—and it's undermining the political system we have.

In a legislative body that is constantly blinded by the goal of staying in office, rather than passing comprehensive reforms to save our planet, the denial is rampant. Even though 97% of scientists agree that climate change is real, and manmade, these elected officials with no background in science choose to ignore it, and instead put trillions of taxpayer money into a defense budget that is bloated and unnecessary. For climate change to be properly addressed, it starts with Congress. If we invest money into clean energy—solar panels, wind turbines, natural gas—we will slowly be able to move away from non-renewable, dirty sources.

We also must take a stand against the corporations profiting off of non-renewable sources, making it clear that their campaign contributions should not be the difference between whether or not we leave a healthier planet for future generations. If we wait long enough, it will be too late to do anything. It's not part of a "liberal agenda" that some in Congress like to criticize. It's a common problem that is hurting our common home, and it's up to all of humankind to deal with it. That can't happen if the political charades are continued in Washington, D.C.

ELLERY HARKNESS, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

My fellow Americans, there are many important issues burdening our world today; in order to fix these problems, we need an education system that produces well educated leaders to solve these issues. Our education system as it stands today needs to be modified and socioeconomic factors hindering education need to be addressed.

Education should be an equalizer, so that anyone, no matter their circumstances, can realize their potential; this isn't the reality though. The truth is that kids from disadvantaged families have a far lower chance for success. Inequality due to wealth and race are huge problems; the disturbing school to prison pipeline is one outcome of this. Only 1 in 12 children in poverty will graduate from college today and almost half won't graduate from high school. Studies have also found that African American and Hispanic high school graduation rates are 10% lower than the U.S. average. Education can raise people out of poverty, while ignoring these problems only continues to perpetrate a horrific cycle of poverty and create more economic problems.

Consider that by 2020, 65% of U.S. jobs will require a postsecondary education, according to Georgetown Public Policy Institute. Yet only 1 of 4 students are ready for college in the 4 core subjects when graduating high school, according to U.S. news. Regrettably, the education system not only isn't preparing students for college, it also forces students to bear an unreasonable financial burden in order to go to college. With free or reduced tuition programs, college education would be more accessible.

There is no single fix for the educational problems plaguing our country yet it is clear that major reforms need to take place. Potential solutions are policies that provide family support so that students grow up in places that encourage learning. Since teachers are the most important aspect of education, more resources could be put into teacher programs and salaries that incentivize job growth. Congress could also work towards bipartisan policies that ensure schools around the U.S. have equal quality and access to resources through more funding. In 2015, 55% of government funding went to the military, while only 6% went to education. An increase in education funding is a justifiable change that could dramatically help broken systems.

With a better educated workforce, people will have better jobs and rely on government less, benefiting the U.S. economy. Opportunity gaps in education would also decrease and the U.S. would become more competitive as a result. This is another incentive for making education a priority to those in Washington.

Our combined futures are dependent on the youth of today; but our nation's children are only as good as the education they are provided with. As Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Let's take advantage of it.

MEGAN HUGHES, CANAAN MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

As many Americans know, we are very blessed to have colleges available in our country. College allows a young adult to further his or her knowledge of the world around them so they can be ready to enter the workforce. College tuition used to be affordable, so that everyone could further their education. This is important because more educated people means a stronger growing economy. At the same time, the cost of tuition rises dramatically each year, and families with more than one child find themselves in tough financial situations. Most of the time people use loans, and end up paying back student debt for years. Every American deserves to have a college education, which is why state colleges should be tuition free.

Elementary and high school is mandatory for all American citizens. Parents who refuse to send their children to school have to pay large fines or even serve jail time. If early education is this important to Americans, why is college not? Why should the emphasis just be on getting a primary or secondary education? More and more jobs today are requiring higher than just a high school diploma. In an article by Adam Davidson, he says that "Workers with more education are more productive, which makes companies more profitable and the overall economy grow faster." This is true, more educated people means more jobs are being done correctly and efficiently, and as a result boosting the economy.

In an article by Steven Goodman he said "Two-thirds of American undergraduates are in debt. This year, student loan debt will grow to more than a trillion dollars, outpacing credit card debt for the first time." This article was written in 2011, meaning only four years ago student debt was already in the trillions. When young adults leave home and enter the work force, they have to deal with adult responsibilities for the first time. On top of that, they usually need to pay off student debt. If college were to be tuition free these people would not have large debts. The money they make could go towards paying bills, and saving money for their future or retirement. It would also help attract those who were never thinking about

going to college because of the high costs. All this leads to more people buying and selling goods which is important for a country to prosper.

State colleges should be free because the economy will grow faster with more educated people, and young adults will not be paying college debt for half their life. How exactly this would be done is simple, put higher taxes on the wealthy. With the top class distributing their money towards education, everyone can have the opportunity to further their education. People can use their hard working money on other things, like purchasing a house or providing for a child. That is why it is important to have free college tuition because it creates an educated population, less debt, and saving for other necessities.

TORI JARVIS, MISSISQUOI VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

Since the recent crimes committed by the terror group ISIS, hate crimes against Muslims have skyrocketed. Recently, "an Arab-American man was brutally attacked by two white men . . . (who) also taunted his daughter, who wears a hijab, making references to ISIS . . . The attackers called (them) 'r-head' and said, 'Go back to your country.'" Wrote Tom Carter for an article on the World Socialist Website. Obviously, these men attacked the man and his daughter for their race and religion, equating the fact that they were Muslim with terrorism even though there was no sensible reason to. People are so scared of terrorism that they lash out at anything they can associate with it.

People in power or who wish to be in power are using this fear to convince them that Muslims are the ones to be feared. The most recent—and most dangerous—example is Donald Trump, who wants to ban Muslims from coming into the country. This move has not only heightened the fear of ISIS, but made people believe the Muslims currently in our country are associated with terrorism, creating more violence. Encouraged by Presidential candidates like Donald Trump, some Americans blame the entire religion of Islam, and anyone who follows it, for all of our country's problems. They believe that because these terrorists are following a distorted version of the Qu'ran and the religion of Islam, that anyone else who worships the peaceful religion is a terrorist as well. Unfortunately, people don't realize that Muslims are not terrorists. Muslim athlete Muhammad Ali once said; "Terrorists are not following Islam. Killing people and blowing up people and dropping bombs in places and all this is not the way to spread the word of Islam. So people realize now that all Muslims are not terrorists." Muslims are too often oppressed, even violently attacked by Americans who blame them for terrorism. Muslims in America today are now experiencing racism the way black people used to, and are violently and verbally abused by white people who are looking for someone to blame.

Jermaine Jackson, one of Michael Jackson's siblings, has pointed out "Muslims have become the new Negroes in America. They are being mistreated at airports, by the Immigration—everywhere. Islam is a religion of peace. They are wrong." People who wear hijabs seem to have a target placed on them. Muslims are "randomly selected" for full body searches at airports, forced to prove they're in this country legally, and attacked by people who have different religious opinions. The violence against Muslims must end, whether it physical or mental. As the civil war in the Middle East is creating unlivable conditions for its inhabitants, they're counting on us to take them in and keep them safe.

America is trying to divide and conquer—focusing on conquering Muslims as a whole rather than just ISIS. Rather than attacking the Muslims in our country, we should be focusing on the actual members of ISIS, and not people who have no association with the organization.

ALEXIS MANCHESTER, GREEN MOUNTAIN TECHNOLOGY AND CAREER CENTER (FINALIST)

Today in America, people are going to prison wasting countless economic resources and potentially ruining the lives of people all because of the recreational use of marijuana.

While people often say marijuana is a gateway drug, I strongly disagree. There are more people that drink a glass of milk per day and become addicted to more serious drugs, than those who use marijuana. It is not uncommon to hear echoes of this sentiment in other contexts as well, particularly, the media and Presidential candidates. In fact, Senator Sanders himself suggests that marijuana should be legalized: "I suspect I would vote yes. And I would vote yes because I am seeing in this country too many lives being destroyed for non-violent offenses. We have a criminal justice system that lets CEOs on Wall Street walk away, and yet we are imprisoning or giving jail sentences to young people who are smoking marijuana. I think we have to think through this war on drugs which has done an enormous amount of damage." I strongly agree with this statement because there is not one reported death from an overdose of marijuana. In fact, 88,000 people have died from alcohol use. I personally have never heard of somebody murdering someone because they were under the influence of marijuana. Alcohol on the other hand, has been proven to impact our culture negatively.

Facts don't lie. 58% of Americans think marijuana should be legalized, including me. Around 40% of Americans admit to already using marijuana. If marijuana was legalized, we could tax it and allow citizens who choose to use it to benefit our communities in more effective ways than keeping it illegal. Marijuana is a safer drug than others and there is a very low risk of abuse. Marijuana can be safe and useful for instance. Legalizing marijuana will bring the nation's largest cash crop under the rule of law, creating jobs, and economic opportunities in the formal economy instead of the illicit market. Washington, Alaska, Oregon and Colorado haven't had any major issues with their legalization. Washington State raked in more than \$70 million in taxes its first year of legal regulated marijuana sales. In Colorado the total of marijuana tax and license cash funds is the total of \$11,290,012 annually. Alaska stands to make between \$5.1 million and \$19.2 million in tax revenue from commercial marijuana in 2016, according to the preliminary estimate by the Alaska Department of Revenue. Oregon's first week of recreational use of marijuana sales top \$11 million dollars. Clearly, the taxes incurred would positively benefit our state and country should we choose to jump on board.

In closing, I hope you can appreciate my ideas, although I am just one voice. America is a progressive kind of people and we must do what we can to continue to demonstrate the values that make us great. Thank you for your time.●

#### RECOGNIZING THE LOUISIANA MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION

● Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, today my colleague Senator BILL CASSIDY and I are honored to have the opportunity to acknowledge and express gratitude to the Louisiana Municipal