

McElroy Trust Gold Star Teacher of the Year in the Cedar Valley and Teacher of the Year at Columbus High School.

During his time at Columbus, Gary Schneiders has taught world history, applied economics, current world history and advanced placement European history. Through his world history and European history classes, Mr. Schneiders has taken it upon himself to educate his students about the many sacrifices our military men and women have endured throughout history.

This February, Gary Schneiders will be leading his 12th group of students to France and Belgium for a 12-day trip "To Experience, To Learn, To Honor, To Remember." This is the theme each year for his AP Euro trip. Mr. Schneiders leads the students along World War I's Western Front starting in Verdun, France. His students experience the battlefields and trenches of the First World War. They visit some of the great museums and monuments honoring the soldiers who fought in the war. Most importantly, they go to many of the cemeteries and memorials to the many soldiers who fought for the various countries in that Great War. At the American memorials and cemeteries like Flanders Field and the Meuse Argonne, the largest American cemetery in Europe, the students lay flags and roses at each Iowa soldier's headstone. They also lay a wreath at the memorial itself, where Taps and the National Anthem are played. Because World War I is little remembered these days, the American cemeteries see very few visitors from the United States. The administrators of these memorials and cemeteries are excited to see Mr. Schneiders each year with his fresh class of students.

During the latter part of the AP Euro trip, Mr. Schneiders takes his students to the beaches of Normandy. He shows the students firsthand what difficulties our soldiers had in taking the beaches. On their last day in Europe, Mr. Schneiders takes his students to Omaha Beach and the Normandy American Cemetery. Mr. Schneiders takes his students down to Omaha Beach so they can see the distance our soldiers had to cover while carrying heavy packs and under constant fire. The students then go up to the top of the beach where the Normandy American Cemetery and Memorial is located. The students again put American flags and roses at each soldier from Iowa. They also take the sand they brought from Omaha Beach and wipe it over the name on each headstone so the name of the soldier and the State of Iowa becomes easily visible. The students again lay a wreath and Taps and National Anthem are played throughout the cemetery.

Two weeks after returning home, Gary Schneiders and his students put on a presentation for the local veterans and community. The students set up various multimedia exhibits to share the experiences from their trip. This

has become a great event each year for local veterans and the community.

To conclude, I was told that Gary Schneiders' dedication to his school, veterans, and his students has been invaluable to his community. If Gary Schneiders has anything to do with it, his students will continue "To Experience, To Learn, To Honor, To Remember" our veterans. So I congratulate Gary Schneiders on his dedication to his school, students, veterans, and community.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

STATE OF THE UNION ESSAY CONTEST FINALISTS

• Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD some of the finalist essays written by Vermont high school students as part of the seventh annual State of the Union essay contest conducted by my office.

The material follows:

KEELAN DURHAM, OXBOW HIGH SCHOOL
FRESHMAN (FINALIST)

Climate change is the most important issue facing our nation and the biggest challenge our world has ever faced. It threatens us at the most immediate level—the very land, water and air that we have called home for thousands of years. Addressing climate change will require tremendous policy shifts and changing massive amounts of infrastructure that we have spent many years and billions of dollars making. And it will require people and governments to collaborate at a worldwide level. The United States is the richest most powerful country in the world. We have achieved this position in world politics by being a leading force in creating prosperity and democracy around the world. However, by achieving this, we have wreaked havoc on the environment at the expense of the greater world. Now, we have a moral obligation to lead the world in implementing strong policies toward a renewable future. If we fail to address climate change, both our nation and nations around the globe will suffer tremendous consequences. According to the environmental protection agency's (EPA) "Climate Impacts on Coastal Areas", Rising seas alone will cause the United States to lose a projected 28,800 square miles of land. This would submerge large parts of fourteen US cities, displace 25 million people, and destroy billions of dollars worth of real estate. Rising seas would claim beautiful areas all along the coast such as the beaches of Culebra the multi-million dollar condos of Malibu or of the beautiful coast of California. Outside the United States, small island countries that have done very little to cause global warming could be wiped of the face of the planet.

As the richest most powerful country with the oldest, and arguably the strongest, democracy ever we need to take bold action and implement strong policies to stop global warming. There are many things the United States can do to address climate change. We could put a price on carbon pollution; this would create a disincentive to use oil and possibly hurt oil companies profits. We could create strong incentives and grants for renewable energy; this would make it easier and cheaper for individuals and businesses to install renewable energy like solar or wind. A huge step forward would be to ban coal mining and oil extractions from public lands—just this would keep millions of tons of CO₂

out of the atmosphere and greatly help the environment. Merely stopping all new gas and oil infrastructure in its tracks would be a huge step in the fight against climate change. There is more we can do but this would be a start.

Currently the United States has been doing very little to combat global warming. The Paris Agreements were a step in the right direction but oil companies still have many members of congress working for them and with Donald Trump as president progress will likely will be lost and not made. This is why we must fight for this issue, and all issues that we know are important. If we do this, we show the oil companies and corrupt politicians that this government is for "we the people of the United States" and not "we the super huge and super rich corporations of the United States". Together we can make huge progress towards a renewable energy future and towards protecting our environment for future generations.

MORGEN EDWARDS, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR
(FINALIST)

My fellow Americans, our country spends more on training men and women to go to war than what it does on training our family members and our neighbors to come home. We spend more money on the military as whole, than what we do our veterans. Our veterans deserve more benefits through an increased budget of ten percent, we must reform the VA, and help to put an end to the 22 veterans who commit suicide a day. To help put an end to veteran suicide rates, there should be funding to create a separate organization to solely focus on the mental health of our veterans, readjusting them to civilian life, and acting as a twenty-four hour hotline to help prevent veteran suicide. This should be comprised of experts, and people who can adequately represent them when it comes to congress and budgeting.

In order to save our veterans, we first must provide the VA with a better budget, in order for the VA to provide veterans with access to benefits. The projected budget for the president to spend on the VA as of 2017 is 182.3 billion dollars, and according to the VA this is a "4.9% increase over the 2016 enacted level." If we increase the budget by ten percent to start out, than the VA could have more money to provide our veterans with better benefits, thus helping to cut down on wait times by employing more qualified individuals, while helping to provide more options for care and help to the men and women who need it. According to Military times "The average wait time across the system as of May 15 was 6.89 days for primary care, 10.15 days for specialty care and 4.4 days for mental health appointments, according to the report." Wait times should be no more than three to four days, and if at all possible we should try cutting that down even more, to ensure the safety of our veterans.

We must train our veterans on how to readjust to civilian life, help them to find and maintain jobs, help them find housing and teach them about PTSD and mental health awareness. We must train them to not be afraid to speak out about their mental health. Most importantly, we must not send them away when they seek help, telling them to "just forget about it." If we have the means to train them to go to war, than we must take those same means but apply it to training them to come home. No longer should we send of veterans home to fend for themselves. If we have the resources to send them to boot camp to go to war than we have the resources to send them to boot camp to come home. We should try and expand the Wounded Warriors Project, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America, and American Veterans and their efforts to provide transition programs.

REBECCA GREEN, ST. JOHNSBURY ACADEMY
SOPHOMORE (FINALIST)

I believe that one of the most pressing issues that is facing our nation today is the conservative movement to remove federal funding from Planned Parenthood. I think that this is very important, because Planned Parenthood clinics are key providers not only of family planning services, but also preventative care, and other important health care services for low income women and families, and therefore, defunding this organization would negatively impact access to healthcare in these vulnerable socio-economic groups.

The movement to defund Planned Parenthood is centered primarily on ideological and political reasons surrounding the pro-life movement and their argument that tax dollars should not be allowed to support organizations that provide abortions. Yet, Planned Parenthood data demonstrated that only 3% of their budget goes to fund abortion, with the rest of their funds going to contraceptive services (31%), testing and treatment of STD's (45%), other women's health care services (14%), and screening and prevention of cancer (7%). According to a report from the Guttmacher Institute, in 2014, Planned Parenthood prevented 2.2 million unintended pregnancies and averted many cases of sexual transmitted diseases, and cervical and breast cancer through screening PAP smears and mammograms and HPV tests and vaccinations, resulting in a net public savings of \$13.6 billion, or \$7.09 for every public dollar spent. Defunding Planned Parenthood clinics could therefore have a significant negative impact on both these health benefits and the health care savings that come from their services.

An example of the effects of this movement to defund Planned Parenthood can be seen in the case of Texas, where cutting federal funding to this organization led to closure of more than 80 clinics and deprived thousands of low-income women of highly effective contraceptive methods, resulting in a drastic increase in the rate of births covered by Medicaid.

In conclusion, Planned Parenthood has created a nationwide network of clinics that provide a wide breadth of services to low income women and families who often fall in the gap between Medicaid and insurance coverage. Efforts to defund this organization would deprive this vulnerable socio-economic group from important health care services, and cause profound negative impact, not just on preventative care and overall women's health, but on state and national health care spending.

ABIGAIL HALNON, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL SENIOR
(FINALIST)

My fellow Americans, I am humbled and thrilled to be your president. I believe that the American people are generous, insightful, and accepting. Our nation gains its power, strength, and beauty from its diversity. We strive, as a nation, to be an international leader in perpetuating ideals of freedom and equality. It is my concern that there are many acts in this country that violate these fundamental beliefs.

It is important that the United States is a country recognized as a pioneer of social justice on a worldwide stage. It is our moral duty to uphold the highest standards of equality and acceptance. We have made great steps towards this in recent years. The landmark Supreme Court decision in 2015 of Obergefell v. Hodges upheld the fundamental right to marry, regardless of sex. We must further prove our nation's belief in freedom and opportunity by the legislation that we pass. There is progress yet to be made.

Currently, practicing conversion therapy on gay and bisexual Americans is widely per-

mitted across the U.S. This is a process under which non-heterosexual people are subjected to various means to reverse their sexual orientation. Conversion therapy, based on a scientifically discredited premise, must see an immediate ban. It permits the means to punish and abuse innocent Americans. The vast majority of these victims are minors. This practice perpetuates a false and violent belief system that homosexuality is a mental disease and that a cure must be sought. It is an obscene violation of the basic human rights of gay, lesbian, and bisexual Americans. It should not be permitted by law.

Although it receives little public support, only 5 states have banned conversion therapy on minors. These acts of hate and misinformation must be outlawed nationwide. It is an injustice and a crime to subject torture on Americans, most often minors, who have committed no offense. An immediate country-wide ban must take place.

We must work to defy all accounts of prejudice based on sexual orientation and gender identity. The freedom and mobility of transgender and nonbinary Americans is severely limited. Their rights and protection are being eroded by current legislation. A recent law in North Carolina known as the "bathroom bill" allows regulation of bathroom access for transgender individuals. Legislation that regulates bathroom use by transgender Americans is an act of hate and tragic misinformation. Rates of violence or misconduct by transgender individuals in bathrooms are so unprecedented that there are virtually no statistics on it. There is no need for regulation. These laws must immediately be struck down. These are basic and necessary rights and they must not be infringed upon. Discriminatory acts based on sexuality and gender identity have implications outside of their specific goals. The use of U.S. law to marginalize any group perpetuates dangerous and violent beliefs. Our misunderstanding cannot become rejection. Our fear cannot manifest into anger.

Americans will not stand for the perpetuation of hate, fear, and misinformation. We will not reject our neighbors and our friends. Our country must make these necessary steps towards true equality.

KARLEY ZIER, MISSISQUOI VALLEY UNION HIGH
SCHOOL JUNIOR (FINALIST)

Raising the price of minimum wage would benefit everyone differently, but all in a commendable way. This would give people on government assistance more of an incentive to secure a job. It would keep the average family of four from drowning in debt just to buy groceries for the week. According to Sherrod Brown, Senator of Ohio, "Anyone who's tried to pay a heating bill, fill a prescription, or simply buy groceries knows all too well that the current minimum wage does not cut the mustard." Sherrod explains exactly how tough it is to try and survive off from the ongoing minimum wage price.

Minimum wage in Vermont should be raised for a multitude of reasons. One way the state could benefit from this would be the amount of people withdrawing from welfare and other government funded programs. The state could benefit from this act because unemployed rates would go down with more people applying for jobs. Families living off of minimum wage have barely enough money to meet their basic needs per week or per month. Someone making minimum wage at \$9.60 an hour for eight hours a day and five days a week will earn \$384. Therefore, one will make \$1,536 per month without any taxes being taken out. According to USA Today, the average cost of groceries per week for a family of four is \$150-\$200. The average cost of rent in Vermont is \$900 per

month. Being left with \$436, which would be non-existent due to taxes, leaves no room to pay for other needs or necessities. People wouldn't have money to pay for phone bills, transportation expenses, or daycare because one would be working. Someone would not be able to pay for any of these necessities because of the fact they wouldn't be able to afford them living off of minimum wage.

People who are using government assistance programs could benefit from this because there would be a reason for them to want to work. If people make the same amount off of welfare as they are making while working a forty hour job each week, of course they are going to choose welfare, or other government assistance programs. There is no incentive for the people on welfare to want to get a job with the minimum wage being so low and having to pay for expenses they wouldn't need to pay for while being unemployed. The other people in the state could benefit from this by the amount of people withdrawing from the welfare program. The more people who withdraw from the system, the less tax money that one say to pay to fund these types of programs. Overall, those are the reasons why the minimum wage in Vermont should be raised.●

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message from the President of the United States was communicated to the Senate by Mr. Pate, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGE REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate a message from the President of the United States submitting a nomination which was referred to the appropriate committees.

(The message received today is printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 3:02 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mr. Novotny, 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. 7. An act to prohibit taxpayer funded abortions.

H.R. 589. An act to establish Department of Energy policy for science and energy research and development programs, and reform National Laboratory management and technology transfer programs, and for other purposes.

H.R. 600. An act to promote Internet access in developing countries and update foreign policy toward the Internet, and for other purposes.

H.R. 601. An act to enhance the transparency and accelerate the impact of assistance provided under the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 to promote quality basic education in developing countries, to better enable such countries to achieve universal access to quality basic education and improved learning outcomes, to eliminate duplication and waste, and for other purposes.

The message further announced that pursuant to sections 5580 and 5581 of the revised statutes (20 U.S.C. 42-43), and the order of the House of January