

of Economic Analysis at the U.S. Department of Commerce, was the Director for Congressional and Intragovernmental Affairs at the Economics and Statistics Administration, and worked for 2 years at the Bureau of the Census. Kerry began his governmental career as a Senior Economist at the Joint Economic Committee in July 1997.

During his time in the government, Kerry won a wide variety of performance awards for his work. However, I am sure that he feels his most important award is his forthcoming and well-deserved retirement. Kerry plans to relocate full-time to the Sperryville, VA, area, where he owns and runs a popular coffee shop. Kerry's plans include expanding the services offered by his shop to include a wine bar, and he has expressed an interest in raising chickens and miniature goats. While these subjects are far from the expertise he has shown in his time in and around the intelligence community, I am sure he will excel at them just as he has in his time with SSCI.

Kerry Suttan, we wish you great success and great happiness in your retirement. Thank you for your years of service.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

STATE OF THE UNION ESSAY FINALISTS

• Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I would like to congratulate more finalists in this year's State of the Union Essay Contest and, as I did with the finalists I recognized yesterday, I ask that their essays be printed in the RECORD.

The material follows:

MAISIE NEWBURY, MIDDLEBURY UNION HIGH SCHOOL, JUNIOR

"Whenever you feel like criticizing anyone, just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had." The Great Gatsby, page 1. This was one of my father's favorite quotes when I was growing up. He always cautioned me to think before I spoke or better yet, "think before you think." While some might call this inauthentic, my father called it sensible.

I am not blind to the privilege I possess. Though, living in the big house atop the hill with my two healthy, living parents in the sheltered town of Weybridge, Vermont, it would be an easy thing to forget—if it weren't for my brother, Robbie.

Robbie does not talk much. He cannot read. He cannot write. He has "Severe, Regressive Autism," a developmental disorder that inhibits his literacy and communication skills. When I was younger, my parents explained to me that the world looked different to Robbie. It was louder, brighter and so much bigger. Living with Robbie, I am constantly reminded of my privilege. Every time I speak, run, ski, read, write . . . I'm doing something that he cannot. All the things I do on a daily basis are insurmountable obstacles to him. Yet, even without these luxuries, my brother smiles and laughs—he enjoys his life and his experience because he owns it. No one should be allowed to take that from him.

Yet, my brother's access to the care he needs has decreased immensely in the last year. His weekly appointments with his occupational therapist, which used to be covered by insurance, are now unaffordable as my parents must continue supporting him in their retirement. Learning this, I was upset. How could something so fundamental be removed from our insurance policy without a second thought?

In our society, mental health challenges are often dismissed as illegitimate and fixable. Words like psycho, idiot and lunatic, are thrown around as diminutive insults rather than seen as impactful and potentially harmful. Because of this, mental healthcare is considered a luxury rather than a necessity, and therefore not something that should be covered by insurance.

The union we live in does not value mental healthcare simply because society does not. This issue starts with us. I cannot stay silent and watch my parents sacrifice my brother's future stability and independence in order to be able to support him in the long run; nor can I do this alone. I know that until society begins placing value on the lives of people like Robbie, no one will—especially not large-scale insurance providers. However, I believe that there are other people like me who, if we band together, can create a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens ready to take on the world. For, unlike my brother, my privilege has given me a voice, and it is my duty to use it to fight for him. I owe him that much.

JACKSON NOEL, MILTON HIGH SCHOOL, SENIOR

With a nation as large as the United States there is a constant stream of issues and problems that require addressing. This means that the most important issues are those that involve the largest portion of the United States population. In that way, the biggest issue that the United States should currently focus on is making sure that every American can afford and has access to health care.

Every American should have the right to health care, as wealth should not determine quality of life. Health care is an incredibly important aspect of everyone's lives as it allows them to live without worrying about not having access to critical care and treatment to thrive. In this way, the solution to this problem is the maintaining and constant adjusting of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, "ACA", to best suit and assist the American people. The benefit of the Affordable Care Act is deceptively simple in that more Americans would be able to afford and hold onto healthcare. This means that they would be able to live a better life and be better functioning members of society. The Affordable Care Act has proven to be a legitimate solution since it has been enacted under the Obama administration. According to the New York Times, the number of Americans without healthcare is "down by 25 percent." This shows that the Affordable Care Act is effective at achieving its goals.

There are many people who believe that the United States government should play no role in health care; this is a flawed perspective. The goal is insure as many American citizens as possible it makes the most sense to have defined government regulation. One belief is that there should be a free market for health insurance, allowing companies to compete to provide the best system to benefit the people. There are many problems with a free market health care system that stops it from being helpful and most useful for the American people. A free market is not designed to allow for everyone to have insurance, but rather people who can afford it having better access. This is not

beneficial on the national scale and leads to a large imbalance of power. There are also numerous flaws in the current American approach to health care. For one, even when someone is insured there are upfront fees and payments before insurance kicks in. This means that someone who is insured might not be able to pay these fees causing them to be financially burdened by bills even with insurance.

Universal government health care has proven to be a sufficient solution to the problem of health care. For example, Switzerland has universal health care and a per capita health expenditures of \$1,879, compared to America's \$4,160. Meaning that the United States is spending more money on less.

Making sure that this is available and maintained under the Trump administration is important in the path towards accessible health insurance. No one should ever die because they cannot afford treatment.

HOPE PETRARO, MONTEPELIER HIGH SCHOOL, SOPHOMORE

Commitment to democracy is the founding principal of the United States of America—embedded in the fabric of our Nation, the crown jewel of our proverbial crown. A constitutional federal republic, with a system of checks and balances, is an assurance to constituents that they each have a seat at the table. Yet in practice, this has proven to be nothing but a promising facade. Gerrymandering, voter suppression, and "money in politics" are not a threat to our democracy—they define American democracy. The disproportionate influence of wealthy individuals and corporations in elections and in the legislative process has muddled an honest definition of democracy in our Nation while simultaneously becoming it. However, America's commitment to tried-and-true methods does not necessitate lack of reception to positive change.

Campaigns will always include campaign financing, as the distribution of information to voters is dependent upon systems that require funding. In addition, campaign contributions, whether by individuals or corporations, can rightfully be considered an exercise of the First Amendment right to free speech. However, refusal to set donation limits violates the grounds of equality upon which such freedom of speech is conducted, and can arguably censor and repress the speech of the less wealthy as it greatly diminishes their relative influence. Unfortunately, Citizens United and the subsequent SpeechNow allow donors to make unlimited donations to super PACs. This includes money donated by foreign entities, possibly anonymously as "dark money". Moreover, these expenditures aren't verifiably independent from candidates. Collusion between super PACs, often created by associates of candidates and candidates themselves, is rarely, if ever, regulated. In addition, it is hypocritical to argue, in the name of free speech, that donors can contribute an unlimited amount to expenditures but that those expenditures must remain independent. Citizens United, SpeechNow, and the additional McCutcheon rulings have nearly neutralized the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, adding a somewhat plutocratic influence upon the electoral process and American democracy as a whole.

This issue is multi-partisan. According to Gallup Poll, the greatest majority of Americans cite dissatisfaction with the government and poor leadership as our Nation's most important issue. A September 2015 Bloomberg poll found that about 80 percent of Republicans and Democrats alike oppose Citizens United. This overarching dissatisfaction can be ameliorated by working

to keep elections in the hands of the American people. Political groups, such as the Swift Boat Veterans for Truth and ALEC, were able to influence elections before Citizens United, SpeechNow, and McCutcheon, and are able to influence the legislative process, respectively. However, it's important for Americans to avoid demoralization, understanding that the first step to achieving a republic free of corruption rests in truly democratic elections. A true democracy can be achieved by restoring the Bipartisan Campaign Reform Act, strengthening campaign-finance regulations, and supporting public campaign-financing initiatives. We, the American people, must decide our destiny, and our elections should remind each American that their voices prevail.

ZOE PRUE, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL, JUNIOR

The United States is distinguished by the values that are deeply embedded in our culture and economy. Americans place emphasis on individual initiative and self-created success. These ideas are evident in the Constitution, its amendments, and various institutions. Their derivation is best seen in a famous phrase written in the Declaration of Independence, "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Captured in these seven words are the ubiquitous values of our Nation.

Our focus on individually created prosperity is manifested by capitalism and the free market. However, these are not conducive to always guaranteeing protections like health care for our most vulnerable citizens. In America, there are families stymied in an unrelenting cycle of poverty, and they are incapable of rising out of the cycle for a myriad of factors. For example, access to education and vocational training, discrimination—especially for marginalized communities—higher incarceration rates, low salaries/wages, and lack of jobs. Impoverished people have difficulties paying for the bare minimums like housing, food, and heat. Consequently, families rarely find any spare money to spend on healthcare.

This is an issue because, according to the National Center for Children in Poverty, 15 million children in the United States live below the federal poverty line. There are millions of children who do not receive regular physical check-ups, necessary optometry appointments, or dental care. Children and adolescents are suffering from health problems that impact their quality of life. Many treatable ailments require simple fixes such as glasses to see the board, fillings for painful cavities, medicine for illnesses, or inhalers for asthma. It is within our capacity to fix these problems, so why are we not? We should be concerned about the health of our Nation's citizens as it is one of the most important issues facing the U.S. today.

There is an inescapable need for affordable and accessible health care for the American public. The lasting impacts of affordable healthcare would be monumental. When we invest in the health and livelihoods of the next generation of Americans, we are investing in the next generation of our workforce. Healthier people results in more able workers, who by extension, are able to support their own families. It is one of the best methods to combatting the poverty cycle.

We characterize our Nation by our belief in individualism and independence. However, when we see a system that is relentlessly unforgiving towards people in poverty, the most productive conclusion to come to is that we have to start taking care of our neighbors. The cycle disempowers them; it strips them of the ability to pay for necessities like healthcare. This is why affordable healthcare needs to be obtainable for all Americans.

Instead of repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act, it should be expanded upon. The government should fund programs to offer reasonably priced healthcare to Americans. Doing so would create a lasting solution to poor citizens being unable to access health care. The quality of life for millions of Americans would be improved.

ETHAN SCHMITT, RUTLAND HIGH SCHOOL, SOPHOMORE

I am the grandson of a card-carrying member of the National Rifle Association. I support the United States Constitution and all of its amendments. Despite this, I believe that the way our country's officials have interpreted the Second Amendment has created the foundation for many mass shootings, which have claimed the lives of countless innocent civilians.

A price cannot be assigned for the lives lost due to this awfully dangerous policy of our country; every time another person dies due to homicide, another family is torn apart. Many children have been killed, particularly in church and school shootings. And even in cases where there are children who haven't been physically impacted by the mass shootings, they may have lost a loved one which will take a toll on them mentally and emotionally for the rest of their lives.

The universal definition of the term mass shooting is when four or more people are injured or killed in a single event at the same time and location. According to The Guardian, there have been 1,516 mass shootings in the past 1,735 days before October 1, 2017, the date of the mass shooting that took place at the Mandalay Bay Hotel in Las Vegas. A total of 1,719 people have died as a result of these mass shootings, while an additional 6,510 were injured. The gun at the forefront of these mass shootings was the semi-automatic rifle, which has the ability to shoot a round, and automatically reload with another round that is fired with an additional pull of the trigger. Despite the National Rifle Association's attempts to defend such a weapon as a gun mostly used for hunting purposes, there is no need for this hazardous assault weapon in order to successfully hunt.

In addition, devices known as bump stocks are used to simulate the speed of fire similar to that of an automatic weapon for a semi-automatic weapon. An automatic weapon has the ability to fire multiple rounds of ammunition by only pulling the trigger of a gun once, and are more commonly known as machine guns. The American people have been prohibited from the use of these weapons with the passing of the National Firearms Act in 1934. However, bump stocks have not been banned, and the result of this have been conflicts such as the mass shooting in Las Vegas where the gunman successfully attached these devices to 23 of his semi-automatic rifles, and used them to kill 58 people, which resulted in the most devastating shooting in U.S. history.

The solution to this mass shooting epidemic is clear. Congress must use rationality and act as a bipartisan group to pass a bill which regulates the use of semi-automatic weapons and bump stocks which have both been used with frequency in a multitude of mass shootings across the United States. American citizens have the right to bear arms, but not with weapons that have no purpose in hunting, target practice, or even self-defense.

ELIZABETH TOENSING, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL, JUNIOR

On a summer Saturday morning, I was driving into Burlington. At a stop light, I looked over at a church to my right. A man, in his early twenties was sitting on the steps. He was shivering ferociously, yelling at God, and begging for help. His tremors

were not from cold. He was shaking from withdrawal. Beads of sweat trickled down his forehead and soaked his shirt. His body was unable to handle the side effects of withdrawal. He was a heroin addict. This homeless man with torn clothing, could not access a treatment center. His last-ditch effort was to sit on the steps of a church and pray, scream, for a miracle.

A miracle is "a highly improbable or extraordinary event, development, or accomplishment that brings very welcome consequences." Miracles are meant for things we cannot control, not things we can control like making help available for drug addicts.

By funding public drug rehabilitation centers, we can help drug addicts to recover from their addictions. No addicts can do it alone and adequate support is the only way to help with these problems.

An analysis from Blue Cross Blue Shield found that from 2010 to 2016, the number of people diagnosed with an addiction to opioids climbed 493 percent. Yet, at the same time, there was only a 65 percent increase in the number of people getting medication-assisted treatment to manage their addiction.

Why do we allow the drug abuse problem to skyrocket well beyond treatment resources? Perhaps it is because drug treatment centers come at a cost. They can range from \$20,000-\$60,000 for a 30-90 day inpatient stay. No wonder 77.7 percent of addicts cannot afford it. But for society, the costs go well beyond treatment.

The opioid crisis in America is increasing by the day and with it comes increased deaths and suffering. Some suggest creating injection sites to supervise heroin users to help with the growing death toll. But this is a short term fix. Rehab is a long-term fix and gives opioid abusers a chance to reclaim normal lives.

Making rehabilitation centers more accessible to financially strapped addicts will help the opioid epidemic. Reducing or eliminating the financial blockades to treatment that exist for nearly 80 percent of addicts will answer the prayers of an increasing number of victims of this plague. Affordable rehabilitation centers will eliminate the need for miracles.

ELLA WHITMAN, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL, JUNIOR

When my high school principal told us that there were only three rules we had to follow I was shocked. How can you sum up every expectation that must be demanded of a young adult into three things? He went on to inform us that we must take care of ourselves, take care of each other, and the place. While thinking about these three guidelines it became apparent that achieving them can be challenging at times but the step to do it is simple; you must respect all things. Looking at our Nation today it is clear that lack of respect creates the most conflict in our Nation. Our negligence to respect each other's bodies, opinions, ethnicities, races, backgrounds and beliefs leads us to discrimination, hatred and prejudice. We see endless examples in our lives today.

The lack of respect for one another's opinion is vividly apparent in politics today. The Pew Research Center recently reported how the partisan divide on our Nation's politics is increasing. A study concluded, "The shares of Republicans and Democrats who express very unfavorable opinions of the opposing party have increased dramatically since the 1990's, but have changed little in recent years." This is alarming because if we as people cannot see others perspective, we will not be able to collaborate or work with one another to collectively strengthen our Nation. By respecting others' opinions we can gain insight and also learn their specific needs.

Not only is respect lacking towards each other's opinions, but to others wellbeing as we have recently seen millions of women come forward with stories of sexual abuse. Not only in our Nation's history but in present day, women are treated as objects. Just within the last twenty four hours, additional notable people have come forward with their previous stories of harassment such as Reese Witherspoon, Jennifer Lawrence and Molly Ringwald, not to mention the 12 million others who have also shared their own stories on Facebook.

Looking back, maybe our principal had a point. To function not only as a school, but as a community or even a nation we must have respect. To advance our Nation from its biggest struggles and alleviate the consequences that come with it, each person must learn how to see out of another's eyes. Each person must treat one another with dignity. Respect is important to our country because it allows us to adjoin together as one. Our Nation was created upon respect and embracing one another for their differences. Each person's difference allows us to be the unique nation we are today. We must embrace and respect every opinion that each one of us has, every talent each one of us possesses and every person each one of us is.

NAME WITHHELD UPON REQUEST, BURLINGTON SCHOOL DISTRICT, SENIOR

The biggest issue we face in America today is that we neglect our incarcerated population. I'm part of the juvenile incarcerated population, and as a resident I don't feel like I'm getting the appropriate treatment I need. I was already here once and the skills I learned were not enough to keep me from coming back.

Incarcerated people need to be given the opportunity and resources to identify what gets them in trouble and to work on their problems. If a person has a history of violent behaviors and is incarcerated because of his behaviors, he shouldn't be doing groups on drugs and alcohol. Instead he should be focusing his time and attention on working to better his violent behaviors so he can be successful when he gets out.

Another issue is that there are many young people in the system who do not need to be. There are almost 7,000 youth behind bars for "technical violations" of their probation. Also, about 600 youth are behind bars for "status offense," which are behaviors that are not law violations for adults, such as running away, truancy, and incorrigibility.

There are another 840,000 people on parole and about 3.7 million people on probation. I would like to see better support for these people who come out of jail. If previously incarcerated people relapse for certain types of offenses like drug and alcohol offenses, breaking curfew, or violating probation, they should be given opportunities to fix that before it becomes a pattern, rather than being thrown back in jail.

I also think they should have more adult programs like juveniles have such as short or longterm programs away from their environment. A placement that juveniles go to after being released from a locked facility is called a step down. Laraway is an example of this, where a juvenile can go and be allowed back in the community. They are given the opportunity and supports to help them find a job and enroll back in school.

I hope that policymakers and the public carefully consider better treatment within locked facilities and alternatives to incarceration for people who are not a threat to public safety. We should ask whether legitimate social goals are served by maintaining the status quo.●

MESSAGES FROM THE HOUSE

ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

At 10:02 a.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, one of its reading clerks, announced that the Speaker has signed the following enrolled bill:

H.R. 4708. An act to amend the Homeland Security Act of 2002 to require the Secretary of Homeland Security to issue Department of Homeland Security-wide guidance and develop training programs as part of the Department of Homeland Security Blue Campaign, and for other purposes.

The enrolled bill was subsequently signed by the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

At 10:43 a.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. 2504. An act to ensure fair treatment in licensing requirements for the export of certain echinoderms.

H.R. 2646. An act to reauthorize the United States-Jordan Defense Cooperation Act of 2015, and for other purposes.

H.R. 2888. An act to establish the Ste. Genevieve National Historic Site in the State of Missouri, and for other purposes.

H.R. 4547. An act to amend titles II, VIII, and XVI of the Social Security Act to improve and strengthen the representative payment program.

The message also announced that pursuant to 15 U.S.C. 1024(a), and the order of the House of January 3, 2017, the Speaker appoints the following Member on the part of the House of Representatives to the Joint Economic Committee: Mrs. HANDEL of Georgia.

ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

At 5:59 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Mrs. Cole, one of its reading clerks, announced that the Speaker has signed the following enrolled bill:

S. 534. An act to prevent the sexual abuse of minors and amateur athletes by requiring the prompt reporting of sexual abuse to law enforcement authorities, 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. 2504. An act to ensure fair treatment in licensing requirements for the export of certain echinoderms; to the Committee on Environment and Public Works.

H.R. 2646. An act to reauthorize the United States-Jordan Defense Cooperation Act of 2015, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Foreign Relations.

H.R. 2888. An act to establish the Ste. Genevieve National Historic Site in the State of Missouri, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

H.R. 4547. An act to amend titles II, VIII, and XVI of the Social Security Act to improve and strengthen the representative payment program; to the Committee on Finance.

MEASURES PLACED ON THE CALENDAR

The following bills were read the second time, and placed on the calendar:

H.R. 1551. An act to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to modify the credit for production from advanced nuclear power facilities.

H.R. 2372. An act to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to clarify the rules relating to veteran health insurance and eligibility for the premium tax credit.

H.R. 2579. An act to amend the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to allow the premium tax credit with respect to unsubsidized COBRA continuation coverage.

The following bills were read the first and second times by unanimous consent, and placed on the calendar:

H.R. 1809. An act to reauthorize and improve the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974, and for other purposes.

H.R. 3445. An act to enhance the transparency and accelerate the impact of programs under the African Growth and Opportunity Act and the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and for other purposes.

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-4237. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Isoxaben; Pesticide Tolerances" (FRL No. 9972-75) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 1, 2018; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC-4238. A communication from the Director of the Regulatory Management Division, Environmental Protection Agency, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Fomesafen; Pesticide Tolerances" (FRL No. 9972-66) received during adjournment of the Senate in the Office of the President of the Senate on February 1, 2018; to the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry.

EC-4239. A communication from the First Vice President and Vice Chairman of the Board of the Export-Import Bank, transmitting, pursuant to law, the Bank's 2017 Annual Report; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-4240. A communication from the Secretary of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, a six-month periodic report on the national emergency that was declared in Executive Order 13441 with respect to Lebanon; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-4241. A communication from the Secretary of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, a six-month periodic report on the national emergency with respect to persons undermining democratic processes or institutions in Zimbabwe that was declared in Executive Order 13288 of March 6, 2003; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-4242. A communication from the Chairman, Federal Housing Finance Board, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the Board's Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2018 - 2022; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.