

teacher's certificate. She taught first grade for 3 years in St. Paul, MN, while her husband, Russ, completed graduate school and later taught second and fourth grade in Boiling Springs, PA, when Russ started his political science teaching career.

When Ann and Russ moved their young family to Forest Grove, Ann continued her education and enrolled in night classes at Pacific University where Russ had started teaching. In addition to raising their two sons, Tony and Jason, Ann also began volunteering in Forest Grove's library across the street from her classes.

Eventually, Ann's enthusiasm to share her love of reading turned into a career spanning five decades. The library became Ann's classroom where she worked with parents and caregivers to help children become active readers.

In 1975, Ann and her former colleague Barbara Dunnette organized BEAR month—Be Enthusiastic About Reading—at the Forest Grove Library, and the tradition has continued ever since. January 2016 will be the 37th annual BEAR month at Forest Grove.

Ann's dedication and love of learning is an inspiration to our State and our Nation, and I have no doubt there are kids today who are better off because of Ann's selfless devotion. I thank Ann for her many years of hard work and for the great things she has done to promote reading and literacy in the Forest Grove community.●

TRIBUTE TO ANNE WOIWODE

● Mr. PETERS. Mr. President, today I wish to recognize Anne Woiwode of Okemos, MI, as she ends 35 years of service with the Sierra Club's Michigan chapter. Through her leadership, the organization's work has been critical in preserving numerous wilderness areas, tracking and curtailing pollution, and leading the fight for clean energy in the beautiful State of Michigan. I am honored to acknowledge Ms. Woiwode's career-long commitment to safeguarding the flourishing habitats and environmental wonders Michigan has to offer.

Ms. Woiwode began her involvement with the Sierra Club as a young mother after moving to Michigan with her husband, Tom, in 1980. Her impact was felt immediately, and the environmental community grew quickly. In 1983, Anne became the chapter chair, and in 1985 she became its first executive director. Knowing the power of collaboration in changing policy, she helped form the Michigan Environmental Council, MEC, in 1980, serving in many leadership roles over the years. Thanks to her direction, the MEC is a fully independent organization with over 70 member groups, and it continues to provide policy expertise to the environmental community.

Breathtaking wildernesses like the Nordhouse Dunes and Sturgeon River Gorge exist due in part to Ms. Woiwode's dedication. She was instru-

mental in the establishment of 90,000 acres of protected wilderness under the Michigan Wilderness Heritage Act of 1987. Today countless species of plants and animals flourish in these protected ecosystems.

In addition to working to preserve Michigan's diverse ecosystems, Ms. Woiwode also dedicated over a decade of work to reducing pollution from concentrated animal feeding operations, CAFOs, or animal factories. Ms. Woiwode came to listen when rural residents and small family farms reached out for help, even though they were too intimidated by their CAFO neighbors to provide names. Countless stories and evidence of animal waste carried into Michigan's waterways, toxic fumes from millions of gallons of raw sewage spread on massive farm fields, and sickness were responded to in attempts to reduce CAFO pollution. While it's still a problem in Michigan, thanks to Ms. Woiwode, the Sierra Club's Michigan chapter is recognized as the national expert in tracking CAFO pollution.

While her commitment to protecting Michigan's ecosystems and tracking pollution are worth acknowledging alone, Ms. Woiwode's leadership in turning Michigan toward a clean energy future is perhaps the most important step in preserving Michigan's environment. Through the Clean Energy NOW Coalition, she organized environmental and citizens groups to protest the construction of eight proposed coal power plants in Michigan without additional review by the Governor. The coalition's emphasis on citizen pressure and legal avenues led to a Governor's executive directive requiring further review of the proposed plants and eventually a complete stop in construction.

I am honored to ask my colleagues to join me today in recognizing Ms. Anne Woiwode's service to the Sierra Club's Michigan Chapter. While her passion and leadership will be dearly missed, I know she has inspired future generations to continue fighting for the natural wonders and beautiful, vibrant ecosystems of Michigan.●

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:

FARYAL AFSAR, MOUNT MANSFIELD UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

"Whoever kills an innocent person it is as if he has killed all humanity"—Quran 5:32.

Being a Muslim girl in the world, I hear many bad things about my religion or my country. Sometimes when people come to know that I'm a Muslim girl they may think that I'm a terrorist, yet I wonder how only 0.03% extremists can represent 1.6 billion

people of the world. As a child, I grew up in a loving Muslim family. My parents didn't even permit us to kill a spider or an ant. I was never told to spread violence in the world. I was never taught in my school or house to be an extremist. In my reading of our holy book, I only found words of wisdom and peace so then why are the extremists labeled as Muslims? How can we say they belong to a certain religious group if they kill innocent people?

As an exchange student from Pakistan coming to Vermont, I was first afraid of coming to a country that may see me as a terrorist since I am a Muslim. I thought I may be bullied or someone would call me a terrorist in school but the love I have received from people here is what I had never imagined. But still when I hear negative news about Muslims or my country on TV or the internet, it hurts me. I want to help people understand Islam and my country. A month ago after the ISIS attacks in Paris, this topic was raised again and political leaders started saying that Muslims shouldn't be allowed to enter the U.S. I ask, is this really the solution to the terrorist problem? How is it that I have been welcomed so warmly through this exchange program and yet there are those who generalize and state that Muslims are not welcome here?

Each year hundreds of exchange students from the Muslim world come to the U.S and the students and their host families form a special bond. These relationships form strong connections and the memories live forever. Our country's leaders should look at what we are doing; young people can play just as an important role as our current leaders. We are not spreading any violence; we are trying to know each other. We are humans and we care about each other. It's not because we're from the same background or religion. What matters the most is how strongly we are bonded to each other.

The problem of terrorism is not a problem for one country but for the whole world, and the solution to it is not blaming each other and closing boundaries but rather knowing and helping each other. I believe that if people open themselves to new experiences and start knowing each other, the world would be a good place.

MEGAN BROMLEY, MILTON SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

My fellow Americans, sometimes overlooked are the basic human rights and needs of the people. While this may entail many topics, I would like to focus on a major issue that has slid under the radar for far too long. The epidemic of rape and sexual assault runs rampant through our country and not much has been done to change this continuing tragedy. Steps may be taken. The first step must address the unprocessed rape kits. Throughout our country there are over 20,000 unprocessed rape kits. Add to this the estimate that 68% of rapes or sexual assaults that occur go unreported. Imagine how large the number of unanalyzed kits there would then be if even 50% more were to be reported. This is a challenging issue and it cannot be solved overnight, however there are steps to take in the right direction aside from moral and ethical obligations.

One solution that could be enforced is a quota, by this I imply that every city must meet a certain number of kits processed in order to get the number of prosecutors facing jail time or other capital punishment inclining. Too many cases go without investigation even after the kit has been used and the victim has been tested, this crime is not fading away and must be faced head on not shied away from due to technical complications that can be entirely avoided. The federal government should follow through with

a funded mandate to state and city law enforcement to help them process the kits and create additional lab facilities.

Now, as I have just said the number of people who have committed a sexual assault crime in prison would increase due to the processing of more rape kits, this leads into my next point of discussion—incarceration rates and funding for prisons. 12.7% of inmates are made up of those who are serving time for drug violations and marijuana expenses. We are pouring millions of dollars into our state and federal prison systems and too much of that is going towards people for up to twenty years for marijuana possession. However I propose to use the funding instead to evaluate something such as unprocessed rape kits and begin to treat minor drug use in a proactive manner. Marijuana possession should be removed as a state and federal crime and result in no jail time. Instead, as a nation we should implement counseling after a three strike policy or enter the convicted into a rehabilitation program if the drug use worsens. Many other countries decriminalized the use and/or possession of marijuana and they have some of the lowest rates regarding drug use and misdemeanor crimes. Just by reducing incarceration of people convicted of misdemeanor drug crimes, there would be an inclination of money to put forth on other issues at hand, not just processing rape kits. Taking one step at a time towards the issues that are more manageable such as the two I have just discussed is how America can move forward, it doesn't need to be a leap of faith and a tackle at a major issue, one objective at a time culminates for a strong, prosperous country.

MIKAYLA CLARKE, BELLOWS FALLS UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

There are many different issues that the U.S. is facing right now, but one of the most beneficial actions the U.S. could do right now is to legalize marijuana. By legalizing marijuana for recreational and medical uses the country would benefit in many different ways. The crime rate would dramatically decrease, the use of prescription drugs would decrease and the economy would greatly improve.

The economy is not in a great place in the U.S., as we are \$18.7 trillion in debt, and counting. In 2014 the Washington Post wrote that Colorado made \$700 million off of medical and recreational marijuana in the first year it was legal. By legalizing marijuana, many more job opportunities would open and a whole new industry is created. The amount that the whole country would make would be in the billions.

The use of prescription drugs such as painkillers and sleeping pills is greatly increasing. Those pills become addictive and many people use them to get high because they're legal and easy to obtain. Children are given those pills, and they may become addicted at a young age. While there is the ability to overdose on those pills, marijuana is almost impossible to overdose on and brings better relief than prescription drugs. Overdose deaths from prescription pills were significantly reduced in the 23 states that allow medical marijuana. By legalizing marijuana the dispensaries get different strains of marijuana to help people sleep or deal with pain. If it's being used in the medical form the THC can be extracted and the CBD's can be used for the pain. There are many different ways to consume marijuana, such as oils, creams, foods, and smokable. In the U.S. there are over one million people using medical marijuana, yet, it's still not legal in all states.

People all over the country are getting in legal trouble for using and possessing mari-

juana. Young people are getting criminal records for a non-violent civil offense, and as a result will potentially be not allowed to gain federal student loans or jobs. With our limited police and jail resources, there are more important and harmful substances to focus on. In April of 2014 MSNBC wrote an article, Study: Marijuana Legalization Doesn't Increase Crime, "Even after Colorado legalized the sale of small amounts of marijuana for recreational use on Jan. 1 of this year, violent and property crime rates in the city are actually falling." Since the government is regulating the marijuana, it will be safer. There won't be strands that are laced with other harmful drugs, such as heroin or cocaine. By legalizing marijuana, less people will get arrested for the use and possession.

As a country we should legalize marijuana. First we should start with medical, because medical patients are more important. Then as a country it should be decriminalized. Then, we should legalize recreational. By legalizing marijuana not only will marijuana users benefit, even non-users will benefit.

MADDIE COLLINS, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

The 2008 financial crisis should have paved the way for a new era of banking, for real reform and regulation, for much needed change. The 2008 financial crisis should have forged the path for breaking up the nation's largest banks, but instead the crisis has taken a back seat to other, more heavily broadcasted issues. This back seat position has allowed the same Wall Street bankers who are to blame for the greatest recession since the Great Depression, to yet again be gambling with taxpayer money. In my opinion, it is of utmost importance to regulate our financial institutions in order to hinder their increasing ability to damage the global economy. We must understand that our country and the world as a whole would be devastated if another large bank were to go bankrupt.

In our country there are four banks that hold assets of more than \$1 trillion dollars. The largest, JP Morgan Chase and Company, holds \$1.8 trillion dollars in total assets, the equivalent of 14% of all total assets held by U.S. commercial banks. Comparatively, in 2001, the top asset holder was Bank of America with \$552 billion dollars. This increase is substantial, and will only continue to rise.

The problem with these large banks is that if they were to go unexpectedly bankrupt it would cause rippling effects on the economy, similar to what the world witnessed in 2008 with the bankruptcy of the Lehman Brothers. To give this some perspective, the Lehman Brothers' total assets were \$600 billion dollars, only one third of JP Morgan Chase and Company's current assets. These banks pose a real threat to the security of our financial system. As described by William C. Dudley, the president of the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, there are two big problems with these "too big to fail" banks. First, to combat the threat that they pose, the government intervenes and gives large banks a funding advantage over smaller banks, thus creating an unfair playing field. Secondly, this funding advantage creates incentives for financial firms to become larger and more complex. As the banking system becomes more and more complex, the risks dramatically increase, only furthering the problem.

In a time where our government officials are advocating for the creation of more jobs and placing greater value on small businesses, we need to be more aware of what is best for this type of business. We need smaller, community banks to serve small businesses for they do a better job of fulfilling

their credit needs. Unlike with large institutions, community banks allow businesses to receive loans based on their reputation and reliability within the community that they serve, rather than basing it solely on their credit scores.

With a clear perspective and a shift in focus, it is certainly achievable to break up our nation's largest banks and ensure that greed and selfishness are no longer the ruling forces that drive our financial institutions.

OLIVIER ENWA, WINOOSKI HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

The country that you and I live in is fantastic and I am really proud of the things we are doing. I would like to address two problems, which are racism and prejudice. Specifically, there are people who are being judged by their skin color or their religion in the United States.

More people of color are being sent to jail than white people. More people of color are also being killed by the police and executed by the judicial system. Bryan Stevenson, a social justice activist, said "I think that every human being falters sometime; no one is perfect. Our mistakes require the mercy and understanding of others, which we can't legitimately expect unless we offer the same to others". Innocent people are being killed for nothing. "Why do we want to kill all the broken people?"

The U.S. Constitution and the Bill of Rights protect people's rights, and we have the right to worship any religion. The First Amendment says that everyone in the United States has the right to worship any god or no religion at all. Over the years many Americans have forgotten the First Amendment when they think about Muslims. Innocent Muslims are blamed for things they didn't do, such as the attack in New York on September 11, 2001.

One cause of hatred against Muslims is the growth of ISIS, which uses Islam as an excuse to kill people and destroy land. Many Americans think that all Muslims are the same as ISIS, which is not true. I have friends who are Muslims and I definitely don't think they are terrorists. Innocent Muslims are being accused of terrorism and they are sent back to their countries. According to CNN, presidential candidate Donald Trump said that, "the United States should come to a complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States." I think that innocent Muslims should be left alone.

Prejudice still exists in this amazing country because I've experienced it. One day I went to the store near my house with my friends. When we got there the cashier told us to put our backpacks down. As we were getting the stuff we wanted to buy, the manager came up to us and told us to "get out of my store" even though we hadn't done anything wrong. I was hurt that he had judged me by my appearance.

Better education in poor parts of the country and the education of police officers will help improve racism in the U.S. The United States should improve education for poor people. Most of the people being killed and put in jail are undereducated people of color. Speaking as a black man from Mozambique, I believe that if education is improved in poorer parts of the country our country will be a better place. Education is the key to everything. ●

RECOGNIZING THE CLEMSON TIGERS FOOTBALL TEAM

● Mr. SCOTT. Mr. President, this month Clemson University played in the national championship game against the University of Alabama. Although they did not bring the championship title back home to South