

AMENDMENT NO. 1582

Mr. SCHUMER. I have an amendment to the instructions at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from New York [Mr. SCHUMER] proposes an amendment numbered 1582 to the instructions to the motion to commit H.R. 815.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask to dispense with further reading of the amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To add an effective date.)

On page 1, line 3, strike "5 days" and insert "6 days".

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask for the yeas and nays.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there a sufficient second?

There appears to be a sufficient second.

The yeas and nays are ordered.

AMENDMENT NO. 1583 TO AMENDMENT NO. 1582

Mr. SCHUMER. I have a second-degree amendment at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

The Senator from New York [Mr. SCHUMER] proposes an amendment numbered 1583 to amendment No. 1582.

Mr. SCHUMER. I ask to dispense with further reading of the amendment.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

The amendment is as follows:

(Purpose: To add an effective date)

On page 1, line 1, strike "6 days" and insert "7 days".

CLOTURE MOTION

Mr. SCHUMER. I have a cloture motion for the underlying bill at the desk.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The cloture motion having been presented under rule XXII, the Chair directs the clerk to read the motion.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on Calendar No. 30, H.R. 815, a bill to amend title 38, United States Code, to make certain improvements relating to the eligibility of veterans to receive reimbursement for emergency treatment furnished through the Veterans Community Care program, and for other purposes.

Charles E. Schumer, Patty Murray, Brian Schatz, Margaret Wood Hassan, Angus S. King, Jr., Sherrod Brown, Mark R. Warner, Jack Reed, Richard J. Durbin, Catherine Cortez Masto, Christopher A. Coons, Michael F. Bennet, Sheldon Whitehouse, Mark Kelly, Martin Heinrich, Richard Blumenthal, Benjamin L. Cardin.

Mr. SCHATZ. Madam President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. PADILLA). Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, I am glad the Senate took the next step tonight toward passing the supplemental.

The Senate will convene tomorrow at noon.

As I said, I hope our Republican colleagues can work with us to reach an agreement on amendments so that we can move this bill more quickly.

If no agreement is reached, under the rule, the next vote will be approximately 1 p.m. on Sunday.

MORNING BUSINESS

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

VERMONT STATE OF THE UNION
ESSAY WINNERS

• Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, since 2010, I have sponsored a State of the Union essay contest for Vermont high school students. This contest gives students in my State the opportunity to articulate what issues they would prioritize if they were President of the United States.

This is the contest's 14th year, and I would like to congratulate the 454 students who participated. It is truly heartening to see so many young people engaged in finding solutions for the problems that face our country. To my mind, this is what democracy is all about.

A volunteer panel of Vermont educators reviewed the essays and chose Leah Frisbie as this year's winner. Leah, a junior at Essex High School, wrote about the impact that banning books has on our society. Abigail Curry, a junior at Mount Mansfield Union High School, was the second place winner. Abigail wrote about Native American access to clean water. Leah Fitzgerald, a senior at Bellows Free Academy Saint Albans, was the third place winner, with an essay on addressing homelessness.

I am very proud to enter into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD the essays submitted by Leah, Abigail, and Leah.

The material follows:

WINNER, LEAH FRISBIE, ESSEX HIGH SCHOOL,
JUNIOR

Books are foundational to our society, as self-discovery is enhanced through reading about different characters, cultures, and perspectives and finding similarities within it all. Books have the power to transform lives, tell important stories, and spread information. As each year more and more books are pulled from library shelves, the opportunities provided are reduced. The banning of books in the United States is a pressing problem that deprives people across the country from perspectives, information, and freedom.

In recent years, the removal of books from school libraries has exponentially increased

in the United States. According to The New York Times, "The PEN report, which counted book removals in school and classroom libraries during the 2022-2023 school year, found 3,362 cases of books being removed, a 33 percent increase over the previous school year." The majority of banned books target topics relating to gender identity, racial justice, and sexuality. Through attempts to ban books, marginalized groups' stories and perspectives are silenced. The act of banning books diminishes the quality and purpose of education. With the absence of diverse stories shared, the population becomes less educated, and marginalized groups will continue to be underrepresented. When students aren't exposed to diverse stories, ignorance, hate, and fear rise.

The Hate U Give by Angie Thomas is a book that tells the true story of a young girl facing racism and its correlation to police brutality in the US. Although it is a heavy topic, it accurately addresses the reality and problems of our society. It communicates someone's life experiences, yet is widely banned in school libraries due to its portrayal of racism and anti-police views. The Hate U Give is a single example out of thousands of books, where underrepresented groups' stories, history, and truth is restricted from the public.

In order to stop the escalation of banned books, Congress must pass the Fight Banned Books Act that was introduced in December of 2023. The act provides funding to school districts to fight against the banned book crisis. Currently, many schools do not have the budget to defend banned books, resulting in a surge of books being pulled from shelves. With the act, The Department of Education would dedicate \$15 million over five years to school districts to help assist in the costs, including retaining legal representation, travel to hearings on bans, and maintaining expert research. By passing the Fight Banned Books Act, school districts across the nation would play a fundamental role in decreasing banned books and spreading awareness.

Congress must pass the Fight Banned Books Act in order to protect the nation from the needless deprivation of information. The issues occurring in society, such as gender and race inequalities, deserve to be shared in libraries. While the intention of removing books from shelves is to protect students, it is doing the complete opposite: Students' education, freedom, and exposure to different perspectives is deprived.

SECOND PLACE, ABIGAIL CURRY, MOUNT
MANSFIELD UNION HIGH SCHOOL, JUNIOR

In the Mojave desert, along the Colorado River, there lives a tribe of indigenous Americans who call themselves the Aha Makav. Translated as best as possible into English, this name means "The river runs through the middle of my body." The Aha Makav are one of 30 tribes living in the Colorado River Basin, where the river has all but dried up and the water crisis has reached catastrophic levels. But they're not the only ones struggling to find water. Research by the House Committee on Natural Resources showed that 48% of Native Americans living on reservations in the U.S. don't have a reliable source of clean, drinkable water—a proportion 80x higher than the 0.6% of all Americans who don't have access to drinking water.

Part of the issue's cause is that when Native Americans were assigned reservation land, much of what they received was dry, barren land in the West that were predisposed to drought. They have also been repeatedly left out of infrastructure and utility development projects that would have brought them running water, leaving hundreds of thousands to haul water by the bucket.

So far, the government has refused any obligation to improve the issue. This past June, the Supreme Court ruled in *Arizona v. Navajo Nation* that even if Indigenous tribes have treaty rights to a river's water, the government doesn't have any obligation to assess how much of it they have a right to, or to help them actually access it.

The indigenous water crisis is a complicated issue that will only get harder to solve as climate change continues to worsen droughts in the U.S. That being said, there is a path to a solution. First, the Supreme Court must overturn their decision in *Arizona v. Navajo Nation*. This ruling was a significant step backwards for native water rights, but it was only a 5-4 majority. If the decision is revisited, it's very possible for it to reverse. This will remove the new roadblock in the way of indigenous water access, and open an opportunity for the U.S. to make reparations and improve water access for Native Americans.

Once the road forward is clear, proactive steps must be taken to ensure that Native Americans can access the water they have a right to. The court must first quantify how much water native tribes have a right to, and therefore how river and ground water will be distributed among tribes and other consumers. Once this is quantified, the government must increase funding for water infrastructure projects on reservations. This funding will allow tribes to access river and ground water, as well as opening treatment plants to create their own potable water.

As the water crisis in the U.S. worsens and Native Americans become more vulnerable to its effects, it is imperative that the U.S. begins to remedy the centuries of harm done to Native Americans by taking action to ensure their access to clean, safe water.

THIRD PLACE, LEAH FITZGERALD, BELLOWS
FREE ACADEMY SAINT ALBANS, SENIOR

The 2023 Point in Time (PIT) count conducted by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) revealed the disheartening truth that over 653,104 American citizens were experiencing homelessness on a single night in January of last year. 40% of such individuals were reported as unsheltered, meaning "living" in a place not intended for human habitation. 41 U.S. states reported a significant surge of persons experiencing homelessness compared to years prior. The 2023 PIT count is the highest recorded count in HUD data, surpassing figures back from 2007. This data is not just a statistical representation: it narrates the lived experiences for thousands of Americans, and writes the story of negligence, ignorance and systematic tolerance for homeless Americans.

Interning at a local emergency housing shelter during high school allowed me to witness these numbers in real life. Distributing gloves, hats, blankets, and food could not overshadow the fact many would be sleeping outside in the cold Vermont weather without a roof over their heads. In my county, over 462 citizens, with 114 being children, were on record as having experienced homelessness in 2023.

Solving homelessness goes beyond than simply building more homes. Even with less restrictive building codes, or a substantial decrease in housing prices, these improvements would not exclusively benefit the homeless populations. With the average two-bedroom apartment being over 1700 dollars a month, the only reasonable option for low-income citizens is subsidized units.

Despite the pre-existing welfare programs like PBRA, TBRA, and FRA that have been assisting low-income families for over 75 years, the HUD budget can only assist 1 in 4 eligible citizens with its current funding.

Similarly, the Housing First model supported by the Biden-Harris administration struggles to become mainstream without adequate funding. Providing housing is the first step to solving homelessness, but there is an entire staircase that is essential to breaking the continuous cycle of homelessness.

Studies show that "wrap around" services are critical for citizens to remain in permanent housing, however such support is hard to find. With the entire nation understaffed, underfunded and overwhelmed the solution for solving homelessness is not quick nor short term. First, support to the private and public housing sectors is essential to promoting housing. By expanding programs such as HOME, PRO Housing, or TBRA will encourage land use and support the housing market. New units can specifically be sectioned off for homeless populations under PBRA.

Upon entering such housing, citizens need to be connected with behavioral, mental, medical and financial services funded by programs like SSA and HHS. Programs under the HUD should also be adequately funded through the national budget. HUD receives a little over 1% of the total budget, yet supports over 3 million families in housing assistance.

Short term solutions such as emergency housing vouchers or emergency rental assistance are not sustainable. As a nation, we must understand that in order to solve this ongoing issue, support from all angles is the only permanent solution to ending homelessness.●

VERMONT STATE OF THE UNION ESSAY CONTEST FINALISTS

● Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD some of the finalists' essays written by Vermont High School students as part of the 14th Annual State of the Union Essay contest conducted by my office.

The material follows:

FINALISTS

LILIANA DICKS, OXBOW HIGH SCHOOL, JUNIOR

Mental health is still a problem in America. Even in today's progressive society, mental health may be noticed, but is never truly acknowledged. Citizens are still feeling sad or hopeless, or even contemplating taking their own lives at such a young age. Bringing more awareness to our youth before they hit adulthood of how social media is affecting their mental health, and teaching them healthy habits of how to handle social media in their lives, would help with the impact of social media.

There is proof that the stories being told on social media of sad and despairing topics are contributing to the rise in suicide rates. According to the National Library of Medicine, "Hawton and colleagues (1999) conducted a study in emergency departments in the United Kingdom, examining the pattern of suicide attempts before and after a fictional Royal Air Force pilot took an overdose of paracetamol (i.e., acetaminophen) in an episode of a popular weekly TV drama. Presentations for self-poisoning increased by 17 percent in the week after the broadcast and 9 percent in the second week (Gould)." Another study taken place in Japan reported, "After 8 April 1986, an increase in the number of suicide cases was observed for four days among 10 14-year-old females ()." April 8th, 1986, was the date a popular singer committed suicide, and her death was broadcasted on social media. Both fictional and nonfictional stories are contributing factors

to this rise in suicide rates. Meaning social media stories period have an effect on our mental health.

There is no getting rid of social media, but there is implementing safe habits. The American Psychological Association recommends teaching children social media literacy skills. These skills with teach children that social media is not real life, what is safe to share online, what too much social media use looks like, how to handle and prevent online conflicts, and to only find things about health both mental and physical, from credible physicians and doctors. I think these skills would be very important in helping children understand the impacts of social media, and how it affects them as a person.

Social media is deteriorating our citizen's mental health, but there is a solution. Implementing good and safe habits during youth and while people are being introduced to social media, will help protect them in the long run. Social media can be fun, but it can also be dangerous. It is important to teach and understand the lines we have to draw to keep our mental health safe.

PATTERSON FRAZIER, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY
UNION HIGH SCHOOL, JUNIOR

One Vermonter every two days. One hundred and forty Americans every day. One hundred and fifteen thousand Americans a year. All of them have died. This is not a war, or a pandemic, or a car crash statistic. These are fatal drug overdoses, which since 1999 have increased by approximately 470%. For comparison, the U.S. Population has increased by 20% in that time. Drug crime has unequivocally worsened, and the entire country is paying the price. Cities are no longer safe, first responders are at critical risk of exposure-related overdose, and as of 2009 the United States was collectively spending half a trillion dollars a year on substance abuse management. Drug abuse has grown to a national crisis and needs to be swiftly curbed.

The issue of drugs is highly complex, and is a result of decades of poor public policy, corporate greed, and government interference. America should by every measure be more capable in solving drug crime than other nations who have successfully handled the issue. We are wealthy, with developed industries and capable medical professionals. So what are we doing differently? U.S. Policy has been historically focused on prosecuting and demonizing addicts. Newer approaches such as decriminalization are a step in the right moral direction, but often lack enough follow-up support and resources to be effective.

President Biden successfully increased the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration budget by three billion dollars for FY 2024, proving that money can be found to support national reform. The ideal national reform will supplement or overhaul the current substance abuse reduction policies. It needs to be built around the fact that addicts are victims of exploitation and should be shown compassion. In stark contrast, drug traffickers need to be prosecuted viciously.

The actions taken to help drug users need to be focused around a long-term vision for each individual. This requires state interdiction, which in turn needs justification. One place to start is to ban open air drug use, and fund the creation of safe injection sites nationwide. If a person is found using "Hard drugs" in a public place, then they should be considered for a mandatory rehabilitation program. After achieving sobriety, previous users need sources of stability. The federal government could create programs to match sober people with in-demand jobs. Safe injection sites will in turn help prevent open air drug use and clean up the streets.