

I would like to recognize and congratulate Bill and Julie on their success and ongoing commitment to producing high-quality goods. Our State owes Maine Stitching Specialties a great deal of thanks for their vision and dedication and for their social and economic contributions to the people of Maine and to our economy. I look forward to Bill and Julie's continued success over the coming years and to watching Maine Stitching Specialties grow and thrive.●

REMEMBERING EDGAR MITCHELL

● Mr. NELSON. Mr. President, I would like to take this opportunity to remember and honor the life of Ed Mitchell. Ed was one of our Nation's great space pioneers and one of only a handful of Americans to walk on the moon. Ed once said of his *Apollo 14* crew: "We went to the moon as technicians; we returned as humanitarians." Ed and his fellow *Apollo* astronauts not only inspired a generation of astronauts and explorers, they blazed the trail we are all now following as we continue to journey outward to Mars and beyond.

Thank you, Ed.●

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:

NICK SEARS, VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL
(FINALIST)

The United States of America is an amazing nation that continues to lead the world through the complex geopolitical problems that we are faced with today. As a strong economic and political world leader, we have become the role model for developing nations attempting to give their people the same freedoms and opportunities that Americans have become so accustomed to. This is why it is so important to work harder than we ever have before to better ourselves as a nation, because what we change will set a precedent of improvement around the world and inspire change.

The biggest problem in the U.S. is the incarceration system. It has been broken for decades, and there has been no legitimate attempt to fix it. Over the past thirty years, there has been a 500% increase in incarceration rates, resulting in the U.S. leading the world in number of prisoners with 2.2 million people currently incarcerated. Especially in this example, it is important to humanize these statistics. These are 2.2 million people, who now because of their conviction will find it much harder to be truly integrated back in their communities, due to the struggles of finding a job with a record, and the fact that they often do not qualify for social welfare. The incarceration system is also bankrupting both the state and federal government. It currently is the third highest state expenditure, behind health care and education.

Fortunately, we as a nation have the opportunity to fix the incarceration system.

First, we need to get rid of mandatory minimum sentences. Judges from across the nation have said for decades that they do not like mandatory minimums, that they do not work, and that they are unconstitutional. Mandatory minimum sentences, coupled with racially biased laws concerning drug possession is the reason why we see the ratio of African American males to white males over 10:1. This leads to the second action we must take; we must end the war on drugs. It has proven to be a failed experiment that has reopened many racial wounds in our nation. The war on drugs also put addicts behind bars, rather than treating addiction like the problem it actually is; a mental health issue.

PAIGE THIBAUT, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION
HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

In common day society, education is widely accepted as a valuable resource to our nation's future. Education has immeasurable impact on our lives and on our identity, as we build foundations of our growth off of our learning. However with all these potentially influential factors that education possesses, the system that we have nurtured has failed in reaching students with meaning and value. Like other things in our world, the system is broken.

What I've been noticing within my own education is that the prospect of content is idolized in the classroom. Teachers no longer cram memorization into our heads (an educational revolution in itself), yet their focus is still the intimate prevalence of deadlines and test scores. Yes—school is where we learn—yet the purpose of our learning should not to become 'smart'. When students start thinking that this is indeed the purpose of their learning, inspiration and drive are completely decimated. Being 'smart' is a subjective standard that we press upon our kids, yet it's something which has shallow value. Classes stuffed with disconnected information only promote this misconception even further. Why should we be focusing on feeding students material when the students themselves don't see why they're supposed to consume it?

And this isn't just the content; it's the atmosphere. An example: When an adult reads from a manual in front of a class, there are two parties in play. There's the instructor (includes the teacher, the manual, the authors of the manual), and there is the student body. Notice it's not twenty individual humans learning differently on the same topic, it is the singular and collective student group. Sitting in this blob of the "student body" and being considered solely for the fact that you belong to a mass of apparent learning is an extremely demoralizing thought in the learning setting. I want to be appreciated for what I can bring to my learning; not what the class average is. What value do I have if I can be replaced with a statistic?

I'll tell you why: our hopes and dreams are original. Our minds run differently. And most importantly our souls all want to go in our own direction. No matter how similar our test scores are, we will never be destined to have the same future, so why are we clustered to have the same upbringing? Why are we held to the same expectations if the only thing that is the same about us is the year on our birth certificate? I understand that grouping students by age is a positive thing, but we should not let that number classify us as learners.

We need to rethink education, emphasizing personal growth versus increased IQ. Students should not be accepted with their differences, but should be accepted because of them. The teachers that guild students should be trained with the ideology that learning is not for a destination, it is for a

journey. Administrators and Curriculum Directors or Superintendents need to see the content and need to understand that force-feeding students knowledge is not knowledge at all. We need to create the environment where students have choice of what their learning environment looks like; choice of how they learn material; choice of how they develop and a choice of how they grow.

It's true: education is an important system that gets a significant share of financial and governmental attention. Now let's make it a revolution of consciousness. Let's make meaningful education for our future; not for our brains.

PETER UNGER, CHAMPLAIN VALLEY UNION HIGH
SCHOOL (FINALIST)

The internet is the first human creation with the potential to unify and connect the world; with the potential to change the way we collaborate and innovate forever; with the potential to reestablish the United States of America as the preeminent global leader in education, technology, and medicine. However, none of this potential will be realized without a fundamental rethink of Internet Service Provider regulations. We also need a fresh approach on infrastructure capable of launching a new age industrial revolution. The United States of America needs a government maintained and mandated fiber optic network. We no longer have an economy based on production of tangible products for a regional economy, instead we produce innovative and revolutionary ideas. Without a fiber optic backbone, these ideas won't reach their potential. Let me convey to you the urgency and importance of this issue. The competition has already started or even finished the improvements this country is in dire need of. The cost of broadband in dollars per megabits per second ranked Bulgaria as number one with a cost of forty seven cents per megabit per second, and in thirty third place is the United States of America at three dollars and fifty cents. This disconnect between value and product is dousing the innovative fire that is the American Technology industry.

What do we do? Myself and experts alike, know for certain that the Internet Service Providers aren't going to figure it out on their own. They are up selling us into decade old technology for a premium. Currently, there is no incumbent to challenge the oligopoly that are the American Internet Service Providers. The only realistic solution to this dire problem is a mindset change in the legislative branch of this very country; people don't do things on the internet, people just do things. Internet needs to be classified as the true utility it is. The internet may be the most powerful collaboration and creation tool ever known to man. I personally believe that we can't currently comprehend the possibilities that will be made real by this truly amazing tool.

Do you want cable companies to control what website you visit and to prioritize services that pay a premium? Currently, these are controlled by a concept known as net neutrality, the cable companies' lobbyists want to abolish this fundamental protection of freedom of speech and innovation. Without this fundamental freedom, the creativity, innovation, and communication, at which the internet is so powerful at stimulating, will be stomped out for good.

The only way to protect the openness, fairness, and freedom we as United States Citizens are accustomed to as well as enhance the creativity, innovation and communication, which we all use the internet for, is for the Federal Communications Commission to reclassify broadband service under Title II of the Telecommunications act. This letter is not a preventative measure, this letter is an