

feed a family. Economically, there is more inequality in America than ever. According to the Pew Research Center, since 1983 “virtually all wealth gains made by U.S. families have gone to the upper-income group.” The top 1% of American families received 22.5% of all pre-tax income in 2012, with the bottom 90% receiving less than 50% of total income for the first time ever.

For the plights of everyday Americans to rightfully regain the attention of the government, the deluge of money being pumped into the electoral system by big corporations and wealthy donors must be stopped. New campaign finance regulations and a reversal of the Citizens United decision will take the government out of the control of the wealthy elite and put it back into the hands of the people.

Policies designed to combat income inequality at its roots are the only way to fix our broken system. For example, we need a minimum wage that allows families an equal chance at happiness. We need political leadership that will give low-income women an equal chance at personal liberty, instead of seeking to strip funding from organizations like Planned Parenthood, which for many women are their only option for reproductive healthcare. We need a healthcare system that ensures that no one has less of a right to health because of their socioeconomic class. We need affordable education and job training programs to give young people the tools they need to contribute to our economy. Tax cuts for the wealthiest have only widened the gap and made life harder for too many Americans. It's time to unite, rather than divide, our country.

In order for the American people to unite, elected officials must lead the way, by following the will of the people, instead of the dictates of their wealthy donors. For example, in their 2014 National Climate Assessment, the White House found that low-income and minority communities suffer the most from climate change-induced events, including heat waves and floods. Still, many in Congress who benefit from oil companies continue to deny climate change exists. Congress must begin a full-scale attack on climate change including carbon emission taxes, incentives for renewable energy companies and consumers, and efforts to protect valuable natural resources.

“Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness . . . to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among men.” It's time for our government to reaffirm its commitment to the founding document which formed it 250 years ago, one which outlined a government whose purpose was to uphold its people's fundamental rights. When these rights are infringed upon by inequality, it is the duty of the government to address that inequality in order to preserve our American identity.

SOPHIA PARKER, VERGENNES UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

Nelson Mandela proclaimed: “It is in your hands to make of our world a better one for all.”

It is easy to feel overwhelmed by the complex and devastating crises we face today as a nation, to believe the solutions are out of our hands. I see two parallel sets of problems. On one hand, we have institutionalized problems which will require institutional solutions, financial resources, and political will. On the other hand, there is a personal malaise, discouragement, and alienation among citizens. The two problems are related because the alienation and discouragement stem in part from systems that have become corrupt and ineffective, serving the needs of the few at the expense of the many. However, there is also power in our simple personal choices and actions, which is often

overlooked. Engaging this power does not require a political solution. A child can bring this forth. The most disenfranchised person can make a difference. This power resides in the simple personal choice to do good, to take action, to care, to make one small or large movement towards making life a little better for somebody.

Every one of us has strengths that we can bring to bear for the sake of another individual, our community, a specific cause, or the world at large. If each person devoted even an hour a week to making the world a better place, it would have a tremendous impact.

You are never too young or old to make a difference. You are never too poor, too weak, or too busy to make a difference. Every single one of us has strengths that we can harness to make the world better for the people around us. My 10 year-old neighbor drives his family's tractor to plow our driveway after every snowstorm, out of the kindness of his heart. My mom and I run wildlife camps for kids; one of our 9 year-old campers started an organization to help older shelter cats find homes. A sophomore at my high school helped organize a winter sleep-out to end homelessness, attended by over a hundred people. These are all young people seeing problems and finding ways to take action through compassion, courage, creativity, and community service.

I serve as Miss Vermont's Outstanding Teen; my platform is wildlife rehabilitation and stewardship of the natural world, which is a cause to which I have been devoted since I was a small child. I travel across Vermont encouraging young people to find their own passion and get involved in contributing something of value to their communities. The response is always inspiring.

The problems around us are daunting indeed. However, we cannot underestimate the power for good that resides in each individual. It can begin with something as simple as lending each other a hand, and can build into making our world a better one for all.●

(At the request of Mr. REID, the following statement was ordered to be printed in the RECORD.)

150TH ANNIVERSARY OF NORWAY SAVINGS BANK

● Mr. KING. Mr. President, today I wish to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Norway Savings Bank, a mutual savings bank based in southern Maine. This community bank has a long and proud history of serving the people of Maine, and I am proud to add my voice to those in our grateful State in recognizing this milestone. Norway Savings Bank will celebrate its anniversary by hosting events on February 5, 2016, at each of their 24 locations across western and southern Maine.

When Norway Savings Bank was incorporated in 1866, Norway was a small but growing town with a third of the population settled today. A century and a half later, Norway has become a bustling mill town, as well as a popular tourist destination. And since it opened its original building on Main Street in Norway in 1894, Norway Savings Bank has proven itself to be an exemplary community bank.

As a mutual savings bank, Norway Savings Bank is first and foremost accountable to its depositors and the

community. At Norway Savings Bank, customers not only find high-quality service, but also an engaged and warm environment. Its dedicated employees have continued the tradition of providing customers with prompt and personalized solutions, regardless of the financial challenge. The bank's great customer service and hard work even has people “from away” taking notice: DepositAccounts.com named them one of the top 200 healthiest banks in 2014.

Norway Savings Bank's investment in its employees is also commendable. The bank consistently prioritizes the well-being of its staff and is consistently recognized as a top employer in the State of Maine. The bank was named one of the Best Banks to Work For in America in 2013 by the American Bankers Association, and branches of the company have been awarded Best Places to Work in Maine by the Society for Human Resource Management's, SHRM, Maine State Council.

Finally, bank leadership and employees prove that they understand the true meaning of “relationship banking” by devoting countless hours of their valuable time, as well as their resources, to the betterment of Maine by regularly supporting important community initiatives and issues. Between 2012 and 2014, Norway Savings Bank employees volunteered 27,788 hours of their time to different organizations in the community.

The bank's core business model of putting community first remains true today even as Norway, ME, and the broader financial depository industry have changed dramatically. I am proud to join the people of Norway, ME, and communities across western and southern Maine in thanking Norway Savings Bank for their commitment to the people of Maine and continued work on behalf of our great State. This milestone is a testament to their hard work over the past 150 years, and I wish them many more years of success.●

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

RECOGNIZING LEFT HAND DITCH COMPANY

● Mr. GARDNER. Mr. President, today I honor the Left Hand Ditch Company, based in Boulder County, CO, on its 150th anniversary. Left Hand Ditch Company was founded on February 27, 1866, 10 years before Colorado became a State. It provides an essential resource for water in the Boulder and Longmont region of the Northern Front Range.

Left Hand has played an important role in the history of water law in Colorado and the American West. In the case of Coffin v. Left Hand Ditch Company in 1882, the Colorado Supreme Court upheld Left Hand's right to continue its use of the water supply in the area. This “first-in, first-right” decision became the basis for water law in the West, known as the Doctrine of Prior Appropriation. As one historian