

(1) on the question of reporting the nomination favorably with the recommendation that the nomination be confirmed, 14 ayes to 14 noes; and

In accordance with section 3, paragraph (1)(A) of S. Res. 27 of the 117th Congress, I hereby give notice that the Committee has not reported the nomination because of a tie vote, and ask that this notice be printed in the RECORD pursuant to the resolution."

RON WYDEN.

RECOGNIZING THE 90TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE NATIONAL LIBRARY SERVICE FOR THE BLIND AND PRINT DISABLED

Mr. BLUNT. Madam President, I rise today to recognize the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled on its 90th anniversary. The National Library Service, or NLS, is an important part of the Library of Congress, an institution that has long been committed to serving readers with disabilities. The concept of a national library for the blind was introduced in 1897 by the seventh Librarian of Congress, John Russell Young, who established a reading room for the blind that included more than 500 books and music items in raised characters.

In 1913, Congress began to require that one copy of each book be made in raised characters and deposited in the Library of Congress for educational use; however, as impressive as this collection was, it was only available to people who were able to visit in person.

In 1930, legislation was introduced in both the House and the Senate to fund a Library of Congress program to provide service to blind readers on a national scale. This led to passage of the Pratt-Smoot Act which, on March 3, 1931, established what we now know as the National Library Service for the Blind and Print Disabled. The act has been amended several times, not only increasing funding for the program, but also expanding service to children and people with physical and reading disabilities and adding what is now the world's largest accessible music materials collection.

Missouri has wonderful local libraries that play a key role in connecting the NLS program to my constituents across the State. NLS and the Wolfner Talking Book and Braille Library serve nearly 6,500 individuals and more than 600 intuitions in Missouri, providing daily access to all the incredible resources NLS has to offer.

NLS is continuing its innovative and adaptive approach to serving Americans with disabilities. NLS has a vibrant history that spans phonograph records, cassette tapes, flash memory cartridges, and the internet, all while continuing to supply hardcopy and digital braille materials. With its modernization efforts underway, NLS no doubt has a very exciting future ahead.

Today, it is my pleasure to congratulate NLS on its 90th anniversary. I wish the wonderful staff at NLS continued success as they work to ensure the NLS mission "that all may read."

TRIBUTE TO CHRISTOPHER PICKENS

Mr. WICKER. Madam President, today I wish to recognize Mr. Christopher Pickens, a Knauss Sea Grant fellow on the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

Mr. Pickens has had a significant impact during his time as a fellow. His expertise on fisheries management and ocean sciences has meaningfully contributed to the committee's efforts. He has worked on several pieces of legislation that have passed the Senate or have become law, such as the FLOODS Act and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Officer Corps Amendments Act. His contributions will help improve ocean and flood monitoring to keep Americans safe, promote deep sea ocean exploration, and inform the stewardship of our Nation's marine resources.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to Mr. Pickens for all of the fine work he has done and wish him luck in the years to come.

ADDITIONAL STATEMENTS

VERMONT STATE OF THE UNION ESSAY CONTEST FINALISTS

• Mr. SANDERS. Madam President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD some of the finalists' essays written by Vermont High School students as part of the 11th annual "State of the Union" essay contest conducted by my office.

The material follows:

FINALISTS

EMILY BORRAZZO, SOUTH BURLINGTON HIGH SCHOOL, SOPHOMORE

Supporting Our Veterans

Every day, men and women in the military risk their lives for the protection of their fellow citizens. The ideology of our nation depends on their service. Yet every day, veterans across the country face issues regarding claim approvals, mental health, and post-service employment.

The lengthy claim approval process and 36% claim granting rate is something that many veterans encounter. The issue is not the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' generous budget, but how the money is spent, and the efficiency/availability of the benefits being offered. The VA should hire more people to process claims in order to shorten the processing time, which is currently four months or longer on average. Hiring veterans in these positions would also address unemployment issues. Additionally, more guidance should be given on how to file a claim. This includes identifying the quickest claim type and specifying what medical information should be given. Lastly, the VA only approves claims for illnesses and injuries which they deem to be a direct cause of service. Extending this to all serious illnesses and injuries throughout life, or at least partial financial and medical support, would be extremely beneficial to veterans and could even improve their mental health.

Studies have shown that veterans have a higher risk for alcohol/drug abuse, and suicide. One in five veterans suffer from mental

health problems like PTSD, depression, and severe anxiety. Veterans account for 13.8% of the suicides in America, and for over a decade 17-18 veterans have died daily from suicide. We cannot take away their experiences, but offering more support in their recovery is the least we can do. Many veterans with mental health problems are not aware of their condition, or are too embarrassed to ask for help. Educating veterans (especially while serving) about signs and effects of mental health problems, and the care and treatment available to them, could save lives. Additionally, implementing a mental health scan for veterans every few years could be very effective in identifying these issues early on, and opening thousands of veterans' eyes to the care available to them. Enforcing quality-of-care standards for treatment in all mental health care facilities would also benefit the nation.

American veterans receive very effective military training and preparation, but are rarely prepared for post-service employment. Studies suggest the unemployment rate for veterans is considerably higher than their civilian counterparts. This can be attributed to the rarity of higher education and the numerous mental health issues among veterans. Increasing accessibility and lowering costs for college education would broaden the post-service career opportunities for countless veterans. Lower tuition rates for veterans could be paid for by the VA, with the extra money resulting from having to offer less veterans unemployment benefits.

Our nation cannot forget the selfless sacrifices our soldiers and military families make. Brave women and men have been taking care of this nation for almost 250 years. It's time we start taking care of them.

LING BUSHEY, BELLOWS FREE ACADEMY,
FAIRFAX, SENIOR

The sexual health education and curriculum in America is not adequate to our current society, and should be focused on immensely to ensure better health in our youth population. Kids are not educated on the topics revolving around sexual health, and this leads to struggling mental health effects and potentially life changing decisions that teens should be informed on.

Ignorance on sexual orientation, contraceptives, and diseases leads to a dangerous society, where teens are unaware of consequences and ignorant to possible solutions of preventions. According to the USC Department of Nursing, nearly 750,000 teenagers in the United States will become pregnant this year; and half of the 20 million new cases of sexually transmitted diseases will be diagnosed in young people ages 15 to 24. Being informed about the physical, mental, and emotional changes in a teenagers' life and environment will benefit not only the person learning, but relationships surrounding them for years to come. By starting to educate kids in middle school will normalize these discussions to be had later on, and create a more open and unjudged environment. According to the United Nations, understanding one's own body is a human right, and the US needs to address a human's right to learn about their body and have legislature and youth service providers fund and educate a coherent and inclusive sexual education across the nation.

A guaranteed cohesive program or set curriculum addressing sexual health, will also allow for schools to help inform kids in the LGBTQ community, what the subject is and how to respect and support members that are a part. The importance of educating a positive outlook sexual orientation, and safe hetero and homosexual activities is crucial. Only 24 states mandate sex education, which is unacceptable. America needs to educate