

same. RFA is the only U.S. international broadcaster to have a sunset provision. It is time to bring RFA in line with the rest of the international broadcasters.

As we continue to fight communism, dictatorships and human rights abusers in Asia, it is important democracy, freedom and the truth have a voice. RFA provides that voice.

This year the U.S. suffered first hand from the lack of free press in China in the wake of the Embassy bombing in Belgrade. RFA was one of the few news broadcasts to reach the Chinese people that provided the truth following the incident. And according to RFA call-in shows following the bombing, over half of the callers were critical of the way the Chinese government handled the situation. RFA also broadcasted a special series this summer commemorating the 10th Anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Crackdown and providing a voice for family members to remember their loved ones.

China is not the only country where Radio Free Asia is reaching out to people. In Burma, Radio Free Asia regularly interviews Aung San Suu Kyi, keeping the hope of her party alive. A series was also conducted this year on AIDS in the country which included medical information about the disease. In Korean, stories ran on North Koreans defecting to China due to its famine and on the South Korean/North Korean engagement policy.

In several of these repressive countries with closed or weak media institutions, the Chinese government—through the Xinhua News Agency and other means—has an impact on the way events are reported within the country. RFA provides an important counterweight to this creeping influence.

As these countries struggle with democracy, human rights and freedom, the importance of independent media sources cannot be underestimated. Governments are less likely to commit abuses if Radio Free Asia is shining light on their injustices while promoting democracy and U.S. interests. I am proud Radio Free Asia is available to provide this service. I look forward to its continued and expanded service to create an even greater audience to bring democracy and freedom to Asia.

MINIMUM WAGE IN VERMONT; NATIONAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM; PEER COUNSELING

HON. BERNARD SANDERS

OF VERMONT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 22, 1999

Mr. SANDERS. Mr. Speaker, I would like to have printed in the RECORD statements by high school students from my home State of Vermont, who were speaking at my recent town meeting on issues facing young people today. I am asking that you please insert these statements in the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD as I believe that the views of these young persons will benefit my colleagues.

MINIMUM WAGE IN VERMONT

(On behalf of Brandi Russin, Tonya Boutin and Nicole King)

Brandi Russin: We are here to talk about the minimum wage in Vermont. We feel that it is a little bit low for the price. The living expenses in Vermont are very high compared to the minimum wage.

Tonya Boutin: I feel that with the life that we are living now, that the expenses are very high, and the minimum wage is not enough. We have got car payments to pay, we have gas, we have other things that we need to spend our money on, and with the minimum wage, it is not enough. If you think about all the stuff—

Brandi Russin: I don't know if you are interested. We brought some forms along for you to look at. Right here, I have pay stubs from a job when I was earning regular minimum wage, and this is the net amount. We just want to note the small amounts on these checks. And we have all noticed, at the jobs when we've been getting paid minimum wage, you get like a \$60 to an \$80 check per week, and you are like, Oh, you know, I can just spend this here, spend this here, and you tend not to save as much money. And as we grow up a little, we know we have a lot to save for. And this is also another job where it is more than minimum wage, and, on the bottom, you can see the amounts are much larger. And with amounts like this, you think, Wow, you know, maybe I should be setting some of this aside for something.

We would like you just to see that. And we also made some forms up on some expenses that teenagers do have in their lifetime. And \$5.25 is not adequate, we feel, along with most other teenagers.

We also made up a little tiny fact sheet saying that, if you want to see a movie on minimum wage, the movie price is \$7.50 to get into a movie. So if you want to go to see a movie, you have to work for an hour and a half at your job to see one movie. And a lot of teenagers like to wear Levi jeans, and those cost—we did an estimate of \$45. If you want to go buy a pair of jeans for yourself, you have to work nine hours for a pair of jeans.

Congressman Sanders: Anyone else that wanted to add anything?

Nicole King: When I started working, I started my first job last June, once I got out of school. I was making \$5.50 at that job, but I didn't feel I was making enough to make care payments, car insurance, and my other living expenses, so I started working a second job. And between the two of those, I was working between 50 and 65 hours a week. And I could only do that for about a month and a half, and I had to quit my first job because I was getting more hours at my second job.

Congressman Sanders: Tonya, did you have anything to add to that?

Tonya Boutin: I was working at a job that was paying minimum wage, and I found that, the more hours I got was better, but my paychecks weren't satisfying. You know, I just—I worked hard to get the money that I earned, and the paycheck that I was getting just didn't satisfy me. And to try to save up money is very hard, because you only get a certain amount, and, you know, you pay your bills and what you need to do, and you only like 20 bucks at the end, and it is not enough.

Brandi Russin: As both of these, I was working two jobs also. I was working over 70 hours a week, and finally I said to myself, I can't keep doing this. And when you become a senior in high school, you realize all the college expenses coming up, and you say, Wow, where am I going to get the money from? So you start doing what we did, and panic, and you start working 50 to 70 hours a week, and you say, Where am I going to get all the money from? And you have to say no to yourself, you have to say, I need to stop and realize what I am doing to myself, and I am not getting enough sleep, and I am just going to keep working, keep working for this money.

NATIONAL HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

(On behalf of Zarina Williams and Melanie Campo)

ZARINA WILLIAMS: The United States should have a national health care system. Nationally, Americans spent \$1.2 trillion on health care in 1998, and the amount is increasing each year. Thirty-seven million out of 270 million people in America do not receive adequate health care. Many Americans cannot afford private medical insurance, but do not qualify for Medicaid or Medicare. Some people who have private insurance have to do without treatment because they cannot afford the deductible.

There are other countries that have national health care. France has a national health care system, where the government reimburses 85 percent of medical costs, and you have your choice of doctors and dentists. Germany also has a national health care system, where the government pays for unemployed welfare recipients and employed people up to a certain income. People who earn high income take out private insurance, because the government does not pay for the health care. Most hospitals in Germany are run by states and municipalities, not privately owned.

Melanie Campo: In the United States, government should provide national health care. Financial means should not determine the quality of the medical services a citizen receives. If we had a national health care system, people would want to become doctors to help people, not for the money. Almost every industrialized country provides partial health care coverage for its citizens. Why shouldn't America?

A plan proposed in Massachusetts would eliminate four-fifths of the out-of-pocket health costs. Funds for this plan could come from savings in administrative costs of the system, money from the federal government, and money employers and employees now contribute to health insurance premiums. Additional money would be generated through new taxes of 1.5 percent on income and 1 percent on payroll. With this plan, everyone would receive the same coverage. This plan would negotiate drug prices and regulate medical costs.

PEER COUNSELING

(On behalf of Lee Knight, Anna Tornello and Gigi Craig)

Anna Tornello: We have changed our topic to peer counseling at Colchester High School.

In the past several months, there have been bomb threats, weapon threats, and many unfortunate deaths. When we were on vacation, the Littleton, Colorado, incident happened, and when we came back to school, we were all really scared.

Lee Knight: And that is why we want to start a peer counseling group. It's because we don't want the same tragedy that happened at Columbine High School to happen here. One of the reasons why students turn to violence was because of the way that the society looked at them. Kids and students should not be judged by the way they dress. It doesn't matter what they look like; it is who they are on the inside. It is just like philosopher John Locke said: People are not born good or evil, but they are shaped by their surroundings. In which, in our case, our surroundings are the society that we live in. And we want to stop criticism that happens in schools all around the nation.

Anna Tornello: As we know, not one student can save a whole school from the same kind of tragedy that happened at Columbine High School. And students have guidance counselors at the school, but most students

are afraid to talk to their guidance counselors, and one reason is because they are afraid that they might tell their parents or they might tell other people. That's why we feel that peers of your own age, you should be able to talk to them. And that's what we think.

Gigi Craig: What we need is full-time guidance counselors to respond quickly to students' needs, if they are feeling that they are going to hurt themselves or hurt somebody else. We can't wait a week, because we don't know what will happen by then.

Anna Tornello: We have talked to Phillip Brown, who is a licensed psychiatrist in Vermont, and he said that the peer counseling would be a really good idea, because it will help the kids be able to talk to other people better, and if there is a problem like where somebody is going to hurt themselves or somebody else, then you need to go seek professional help. But we can help people with just little problems, and that will help the students be able to talk and get out their feelings.

The group at Colchester High School, we hope, will someday help the peer counseling,

and maybe someday it will be able to spread through Vermont, and maybe the nation. And we feel that students should be able to feel safer at school, and that every student needs to have somebody that cares, and somebody to talk to when they need help. And we feel that all these goals can be accomplished with the help of the community, the government, adults, and other students. We don't want to get this swept underneath the rug. We want to make a difference in the community, and, most of all, we want to help kids that are normal on the outside but are crying on the inside.