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November 16, 2012

Dear Vermont Social Studies Teachers:

I wanted to let you know that I will be sponsoring the third annual "State of the Union Essay Contest" for Vermont high school students. During the first two years, more than 500 Vermont high school students participated from dozens of high schools throughout the state. Without exception, the essays have been excellent.

It's my hope that this essay contest will provide an opportunity for students to explore current issues in depth, and will help develop their critical thinking about some of the problems we face as a nation.

I would like to ask for your assistance in publicizing the essay contest. The contest asks students to write an essay of 250 to 500 words about their view of the "state of the union." We will amplify the voices of young Vermonters, who are sharing what they think, at the same time as the President presents his State of the Union address to the nation, scheduled for late January. A panel of Vermont teachers will select the winner.

The winner of the essay contest will have the opportunity to invite me to visit his or her school for a student town meeting on current issues. His or her essay, along with those of the other finalists, will be published in the Congressional Record as well as on my website. Further, I will host a roundtable discussion with the finalists to hear, first-hand, what our students feel are the most severe problems facing our nation.

I would be grateful if you could let other teachers in your department and school know about the contest and ask them to inform their students about this competition. We have also reached out to English teachers throughout Vermont. Copies of the poster announcing the essay contest are included in this packet and are suitable for copying and posting.

I would, of course, be deeply appreciative if you would ask your students to submit an essay – or perhaps even assign writing such essays in your classes.

Students can learn more by visiting www.sanders.senate.gov/stateoftheunion. The poster describing the contest can also be downloaded from that website. The essays must be submitted by noon on Tuesday, Jan. 8, 2013 by completing the form at this website.

If you or any of your colleagues would be interested in judging the essays, please contact Phil Fiermonte from my office at 1-800-339-9834 or e-mail him at Phil_Fiermonte@sanders.senate.gov.

I'd welcome any other ideas that you have about how we can make this project as rewarding as possible. Again, thank you for what you do, and thanks for helping make this essay contest a success.

Sincerely,



BERNIE SANDERS
UNITED STATES SENATOR