

week, it is my privilege to recognize Edgewood Locker of Edgewood, IA, as the Senate Small Business of the Week.

In 1966, Tom and Joan Kerns founded Edgewood Locker as a family-run operation in a rented building in downtown Edgewood. After experience on their family farm, the young couple decided to take the risk of opening a meat processing plant. Initially, the business focused solely on custom meat processing and locker storage services. Four years later, the Kerns family expanded operations by purchasing an old creamery on the north edge of town and remodeling it themselves. The business steadily grew with the involvement of their sons Terry and Jim, and by 1980, they established a generational family partnership. This enabled Edgewood Locker to expand its service offerings, as well as launch a retail store serving cuts, cured meats, and more. Over the years, the business undertook six major remodels to accommodate its increasing customer base and expanding range of services. In 1997, this ultimately led to Edgewood Locker's relocation into a new, state-of-the-art facility on the west edge of town. In 2022, the business nearly doubled its space, adding another 19,000 square feet to its facility.

Today, Terry and Jim continue to run Edgewood Locker along with the family's third generation Katie, Baili, Payson, and Luke. Under their leadership, Edgewood Locker expanded to employ 60 full-time employees from the local community while serving customers throughout Iowa. Edgewood Locker built a reputation for its high-quality meat products and award-winning processing services. The company provides full-service custom processing of cattle, hogs, lambs, goats, and deer, catering to both individual customers and wholesalers. Edgewood Locker prepares award-winning sausages, meat sticks, bacon, and more with their family recipes and works with over 140 retail partners across the State. Last year, the business produced over 1 million pounds of sausage and almost 500,000 pounds of venison products.

Edgewood Locker is deeply committed to community service. The company is a member of the Edgewood Chamber, the American Association of Meat Processors, and the Iowa Meat Processors Association, with over 200 industry awards hanging on its walls. The company also supports local schools, civic groups, and churches through charitable donations and sponsorships. Additionally, Edgewood Locker sponsors the annual Edgewood Rodeo. The business is committed to investing in the next generation by running a butcher apprenticeship program for high school and college students. The program covers the students' tuition at Hawkeye Community College and allows them to learn the skills of the trade by working at Edgewood Locker. Edgewood Locker will celebrate its 58th anniversary in Iowa later this year.

Edgewood Locker's entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to excellence are clear. I want to congratulate the Kerns family and the entire team for their hard work and dedication to providing exceptional products and services to families across Iowa. I look forward to seeing their continued growth and success.●

#### VERMONT STATE OF THE UNION ESSAY CONTEST JUDGES

● Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, since 2010, I have sponsored a State of the Union essay contest for Vermont high school students. This contest gives students in my State the opportunity to articulate what issues they would prioritize if they were President of the United States.

This is the contest's 15th year, and I would like to congratulate the nine volunteer judges who helped choose the contest winners and finalists. The contest relies on its committed team of judges. The judges take time to review each essay and evaluate the diversity in writing that engages students and will benefit them for years to come. The judges' willingness to participate in this project reflects their dedication to both the students and our State, and for that, I graciously thank them.

The judges include:

Andrew Chobanian of Oxbow High School—participant for 3 years

Jason Gorczyk of Milton High School—participant for 12 years

Krista Huling of South Burlington High School—participant for 12 years

Robert Jackson Randolph Technical Career Center—participant for their first year

Krystal Melendez of North Country Union High School—participant for their first year

Mary Schell of White River Valley School—participant for 3 years

Terri Vest of Twinfield Union School—participant for 15 years

Robert Walls-Thumma of North Country Union High School—participant for their first year

Caroline Zeilenga of Randolph Technical Career Center—participant for their first year

I am very proud to enter the State of the Union Essay Contest judges into the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD to recognize their contributions.●

#### VERMONT STATE OF THE UNION ESSAY WINNERS

● Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, since 2010, I have sponsored a State of the Union essay contest for Vermont high school students. This contest gives students in my State the opportunity to articulate what issues they would prioritize if they were President of the United States.

This is the contest's 15th year, and I would like to congratulate the 475 students who participated. It is truly heartening to see so many young people engaged in finding solutions for the problems that face our country. To my mind, this is what democracy is all about.

A volunteer panel of Vermont educators reviewed the essays and chose Justason Lahue as this year's winner. Justason, a junior at Burr and Burton Academy, wrote about the impact of social media on youth mental health. Ari Glasser, a junior at Essex High School, was the second-place winner. Ari wrote about the influence of billionaires on American politics. Ely White, a senior at Leland & Gray Union Middle and High School, was the third-place winner, with an essay on political polarization.

I am very proud to enter into the Congressional Record the essays submitted by Justason, Ari and Ely.

The material follows:

WINNER, JUSTASON LAHUE, BURR AND BURTON ACADEMY, JUNIOR

Social media is deteriorating adolescent mental health, yet the United States' government is treating the situation like a social experiment; our government is waiting to see what will happen despite the mounting evidence that social media has dangerous effects. Until we apply evidence-based regulations to limit social media use, adolescent well-being is in jeopardy.

The current evidence of harm is compelling. A 2023 Gallup survey found that teenagers spend an average of 4.8 hours on social media daily. Alarmingly, a longitudinal study involving 6,595 adolescents revealed that spending over 3 hours daily on social media doubled the risk of poor mental health outcomes, such as anxiety and depression. These are not studies in isolation: a systematic review of 13 studies also found that unhealthy engagement of social media was correlated with depression, anxiety, and psychological distress.

While these studies demonstrate correlation, there are also indicators of causality. Numerous studies highlight how limiting social media use can improve mental health. A randomized controlled trial reported that reducing social media use by just 30 minutes daily lessened depressive symptoms in college students. Another study involving adolescents showed that ceasing social media use for 4 weeks resulted in a 25-40% improvement in subjective well-being (e.g., life satisfaction, depression, and anxiety) when compared to psychological interventions such as therapy.

Social media use can worsen adolescent mental health, while lessening use demonstrates the opposite effect. Adolescent brain development is most active from ages 10 to 14. However, the arbitrary and rarely enforced 'internet age' currently set at 13 exposes immature brains to a world of entertainment, inappropriate content, and harassment. Given these biological factors and the evidence of potential harm, a more appropriate age for adolescents to access the internet is 16 years of age.

I propose a bill called the Youth Mental Health Protection Act. This act would target a root cause of social media-related youth mental health issues by changing the legal age of 'internet adulthood' (i.e., when one can sign up for most online platforms, consent to terms of service, and share personal data). This act would make 16 the legally required age to access social media, similar to obtaining a driver's license in most states, another privilege requiring complex thinking and decision-making. Finally, the Youth Mental Health Protection Act would hold social media companies liable by requiring age verification prior to account creation.

Requiring age checks would likely lessen the negative effects of social media on adolescent mental health, however, this is just