

Jessica is a great role model for all of her students and the folks of Blaine County.●

TRIBUTE TO RAY PETERSEN

● Mr. ROMNEY. Mr. President, I rise to congratulate Mr. Ray Petersen on a remarkable career of indispensable service to the great State of Utah. By virtue of Ray's enduring commitment to overseeing proper land management practices, Emery County flourishes with beauty and opportunity. The residents of Emery County and the countless visitors who enjoy the region have Ray to thank for his 18 years as Emery County's Public Lands Administrator and his lifetime of public service to rural Utah.

Ray has dedicated his career to addressing critical rural issues. As a fourth-generation resident of Emery County, Ray understands well the challenges facing rural communities and the profound impact that Federal, State, and local policy decisions have on the livelihoods of so many. In his role as Emery County Public Lands Administrator, Ray was consequential in assisting policymakers, from the county commission to the Federal Government, reconcile differences and find solutions for the county's land management, whose expansive plans fall heavily under State and Federal domain.

Sustained opportunity and access to Emery County's lands are paramount for its economic vitality, particularly to its agriculture, recreation and tourism industries, and its local mining, gas, and oil development. Ray has helped these key local industries navigate the challenges and opportunities of land management issues, to find compromise and success.

A fitting final accomplishment to his career, Ray was instrumental in helping Utah's congressional delegation secure a victory for Emery County and the State's public lands as the Emery County Public Lands Management Act was signed into law. This legislation marked the culmination of years of collaboration and cooperation with local partners and officials, ensuring ongoing uses will be enjoyed in Emery County without fear of a potential national monument designation from DC and consolidation of Utah trust lands that will generate millions in revenue for our school kids. It also included long-sought local land transfers to meet city government needs while expanding Goblin Valley State Park, a truly unique place that will now be better managed for future generations.

Ray Petersen has championed rural lands issues of extraordinary significance to Utah throughout his esteemed career. Our great State owes him a debt of gratitude for three decades of selfless public service.

Thank you, Ray.

VERMONT STATE OF THE UNION ESSAY CONTEST FINALISTS

● Mr. SANDERS. Mr. President, I ask to have printed in the RECORD some of the finalist essays written by Vermont High School students as part of the 10th annual "State of the Union" essay contest conducted by my office.

The material follows:

ETHAN MELLO, WOODSTOCK UNION HIGH SCHOOL, JUNIOR

I believe that the most pressing issue facing our country today is the issue of affordable healthcare. This issue is unique to the United States among developed nations, but for years we have refused to take action. Not only could switching to a universal healthcare system lower costs, but could also ensure that, like the rest of the countries in the modernized world, the US insures all of its citizens as a human right.

A universal healthcare system is a system where all of the inhabitants of a country are guaranteed healthcare at no cost. The government pays for all medical bills, and the system makes sure that even the poor can be helped when they get sick. Government paying for healthcare means higher taxes, but no deductible costs. This system is a staple in most European countries, as well as in Canada. The US is one of the only major countries to not yet adopt this system. In fact, out of the 33 developed countries recognized by The Balance financial website, 32 have universal healthcare. The UN has accepted universal healthcare as the best choice for countries, and has a goal of worldwide universal healthcare coverage by 2030. If the US keeps its current healthcare system, they are unlikely to meet this goal.

In our country the healthcare system is structured so that private companies provide insurance. However, his insurance often doesn't encompass drug prices or certain other costs, and is not affordable by the poor. The US has a Medicaid system for some low income citizens, but this program does not apply to everyone who is unable to consistently pay for healthcare this has led to over 30 million Americans choosing not to purchase healthcare, a dangerous choice if they get sick or need emergency operations. Our system also allows insurance companies to jack up prices to make profit, and allows prescription drug companies to charge outrageous amounts for cheap pills. The US had the highest insurance costs relative to GDP in the world. This cost has not made our life expectancy better either, as in that respect we are still worse off than we should be as the most powerful country in the world.

Universal healthcare has proven very effective when it has been used in other countries. Universal healthcare lowers healthcare costs, and eliminates administrative costs due to the fact that it is completely run by one entity, the government. In the United States this lower cost of healthcare could not only boost the economy, but also allow for more social mobility for the lower class, and less earnings for the billionaire drug company executives.

Changing the healthcare system of the United States to universal healthcare will not be an easy task, but it is one that is necessary for the good of our country as well as the people in it. In the next election, we need to ensure we elect politicians who not only support universal healthcare, but are willing to fight for it.

SALAMA MBILIZI, WINOOSKI HIGH SCHOOL, SENIOR

"Why should we study for a future that is being taken away from us? We demand a safe future is that really too much to ask?" asks

climate activist Greta Thunberg. This young Swedish environmentalist has gained international attention for her concerns about climate change.

I am a girl from Africa who came to the U.S. as a refugee and I don't want to become a "climate refugee," like people in California who have lost homes due to fire. Climate change first created droughts in California, which lasted over a decade according to Climate Central. There is an 80 percent chance of a multi-decade-long drought by 2100.

Human activities, such as burning fossil fuels, cause climate change. Exhaust gases from cars, uncontrolled factory releases, burning of low-quality coal for heating, even airplanes and ships create air pollution. We should reduce the use of oil and gas, and use alternative energy sources such as wind and solar power.

The government should start investing more in public transportation, which can reduce greenhouse gas emissions because fewer people will have to drive and we can reduce air pollution. According to Energy News Network, "Public transit produces significantly less air pollution per passenger mile than a standard car carrying a single driver. Buses emit 20% less carbon monoxide, 10% as much hydrocarbons, and 75% as much nitrogen oxides per passenger mile than an automobile with a single occupant." Smarter public transportation will increase ridership, cut the number of cars on the road, reduce traffic, and lower greenhouse gas emissions. We could also recycle more plastics and stop cutting down forests. Unless we change our behaviors, global warming will continue and we will continue to experience weather extremes, forest fires, and massive pollution.

When 195 nations met in 2015, they agreed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions as part of the landmark Paris Agreement. The United States later backed out of that agreement but states and cities are still interested. I call on Congress to pass and support legislation to help our environment by honoring the Paris Agreement!

I have a personal interest because climate change affects my life as well as our planet. If we don't change our behavior, we will suffer and some of us will die. Already, animals are going extinct at an alarming rate, reducing the balance in our world and the quality of our life.

Scientists say that if we don't stop pollution and greenhouse gases, Earth will be here for only a few hundred years. But if we can reduce greenhouse gases, Earth can remain okay for a million more years. Think about what will happen to us, your children and grandchildren. I want to be here for as many years as I can, enjoying this world I live in.

PATRICK MESKILL, ESSEX HIGH SCHOOL, JUNIOR

VACCINES CAUSE ADULTS

The law dictates a child as property until the age of 18. While this is usually for the good of the child, what does it mean for the fate of children with misinformed parents? Anti-vax is a deadly philosophy of being against vaccinations, a philosophy that gets children killed. While yes, children are protected from abuse and neglect under Child Protective Services, there is no law to protect them from their own parent's ideas. Parent's can avoid federally required vaccines under religious or superstitious reasons in 45 of the 50 states (NCSL). However, when the safety of the public is at stake, the anti-vax culture becomes a truly worldwide epidemic.

The confusion comes from a defrocked former doctor, Andrew Wakefield, who first proposed the vaccine/autism connection (Ruth). The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) did an inquiry in 2001 to address the