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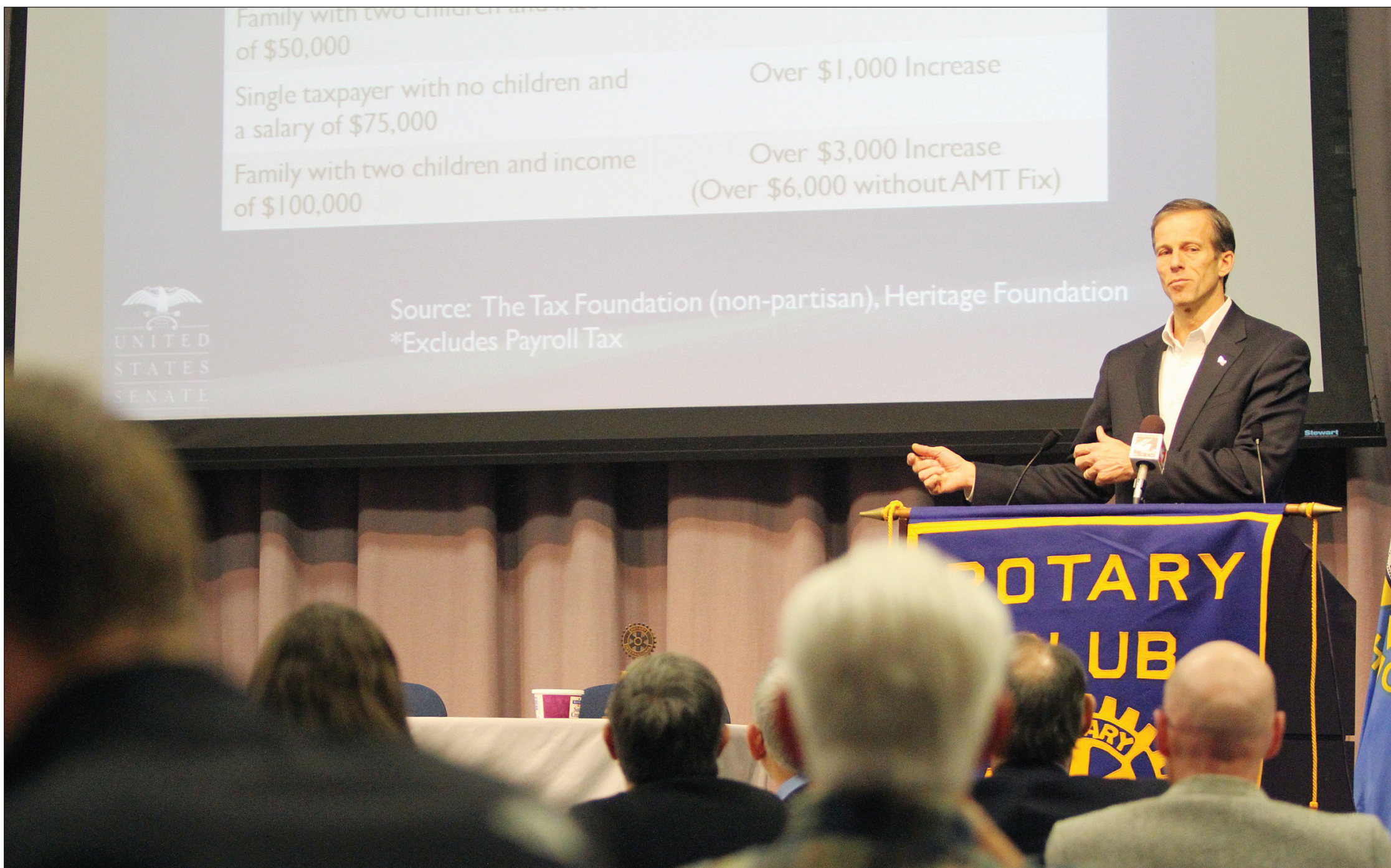


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Sen. John Thune (R-SD) told a capacity crowd at Tuesday's meeting of the Vermillion Rotary Club that hard decisions regarding the federal budget await members of Congress and President Obama. (Photo by David Lias)

Thune: President must lead

By David Lias

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Sen. John Thune (R-SD) told a capacity crowd at the Vermillion Rotary Club Tuesday that cuts in federal spending, entitlement reform and changes in the tax code are needed to get the nation's fiscal house in order. "It's time for us to make some hard decisions. They are going to be hard decisions because no one wants to talk

about reforming some of these programs, but the fact of the matter is if we don't, these things are going to bankrupt the country," the senator said, speaking specifically of entitlements such as Medicare, Medicaid and Social Security that are contributing to an ever growing portion of the federal budget.

The noon luncheon meeting was held in the Al Neuharth Media Center on the University of South Dakota

campus.

"We cannot continue on the trajectory we are on today and expect that younger generations of America are going to have Social Security and Medicare around for them," Thune said. "To save and protect these programs, we have to reform these programs."

He hinted that greater cooperation between Republicans and Democrats, and Congress and the White House is

also needed. The tone of his remarks indicates he believes Democrats and President Barack Obama could have done more during the recent "fiscal cliff" negotiations, and will also need to do more as the nation's next bit of fiscal drama – the raising of the debt ceiling – is about to unfold.

"There have been periods in our nation's history when we've had divided government that have led to great accomplishments," Thune said.

"There is obviously great conflict when you have divided government, and in 2010, voters elected Republicans to run the House, Democrats to run the Senate, and of course we had a Democratic president in the White House."

In 2012, voters decided to keep this composition of national leadership unchanged, he said. While not

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Sandy Hook prompts Vermillion district to review buildings' security

By David Lias

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The deadly shootings last month that left 26 people dead at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT has prompted school officials to review security measures at the Vermillion School District's four school buildings.

It also will be bringing about changes to several of those buildings all with the goal of making them safer.

Superintendent Mark Froke told the Vermillion School Board Monday that suggested security upgrades include the addition of interior door locks on classroom doors in all of the district's buildings.

Security upgrades will also include the addition a front door buzzer and locking system – similar to the one that's been in place for several years at the high school – at the middle school and at Jolley and Austin elementary schools.

"We have the high school building's front door locked during the day," Froke

Johnson 'skeptical' of some gun proposals

By Nathan Johnson

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When it comes to gun control measures, Sen. Tim Johnson (D-S.D.) said Monday he is skeptical whether many of them would be effective but is keeping an open mind for any proposals that come before him.

Johnson spoke about gun control, the debt ceiling battle and other subjects with reporters during a visit to Yankton's Technical

Education Center.

President Barack Obama said Monday that he will discuss his plan to reduce gun violence later this week. It will be based on recommendations from a task force headed by Vice President Joe Biden.

"I'm open to any ideas that make kids safer," Johnson said. "That involves a wide range of initiatives, from mental health to whatever. I'm open to all of those ideas. I'm skeptical about some gun control

ideas, but I'm open to them all."

Asked if he would support a ban on assault weapons, he said he had his doubts about such a measure.

"I'll wait and see whatever options come about (regarding gun violence), with mental health playing a key role," Johnson stated.

On the looming fight between Democrats and

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said. "That is not the case at the two elementary and middle schools."

Other upgrades listed for the district's buildings include placing locks on the

gymnasium interior doors at Austin and Jolley schools, clean exterior door locks at

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Abourezk: U.S. should end Middle East involvement

By Travis Gulbrandson

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Former Sen. James Abourezk has some advice regarding the United States' foreign policy.

"I think it's in the interest of the United States to get the hell out of the Middle East," he said.

Abourezk spoke about the issue, as well as the rebellion in Syria and the influence of Israel on U.S. policies, Monday during a forum in Farber Hall on the University of South Dakota campus.

The U.S. government currently is aiding the ongoing rebellion in Syria by sending the rebels weapons through Saudi Arabia, Abourezk said.

"My theory is ... the reason we're helping try to overthrow the Syrian regime is that we want to break the alliance between Iran and Syria," he said. "The reason we want to break the alliance – even though Iran is no threat to us – is because Israel wants the regime to be



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overthrown. "And that's exactly what's happening." Abourezk said the U.S. would be better off not to help the rebels overthrow Syria's

current leader, Bashar al-Assad, because "that is the most progressive government you'll ever get in Syria."

"It's a dictatorship, but they're not making anything better," Abourezk said. "In fact, if the rebels take over, it's going to be worse. Much worse."

Approximately 75-80 percent to Syria's current population consists of Sunni Muslims, which is a more orthodox form of the religion, while the country itself is ruled by an

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