

Spotlight On

UNIVERSITY OF
SOUTH DAKOTA

Roche encourages use of personal gifts to encourage positive change

By Travis Gulbrandson

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“For those to whom much is given, much is required.”

This quote from Thomas Jefferson was among the messages political science professor Michal Roche shared with the attendees of the 67th annual South Dakota Girls State.

In his presentation on Thursday, Roche said he hoped each of the girls would use their gifts to have a positive impact on the world around them.

“Think of all that you have been given in terms of your innate gifts and the opportunities to which you have had access, like this week here at Girls State,” he said. “You are an elite group, and you will have power in your lives, whether in the public or private sector.”

In citing Jefferson, Roche said that quote had

another meaning.

“It’s not just about whether you will acquire power,” he said. “You will acquire power. I’m confident of that. It’s also about why you wanted it in the first place, and what you’ll use it for in your lives.”

For some people, power is used for negative personal reasons, but Roche added that “some use it to serve, some use it to care, some use it to inspire, some use it to lead.”

He then shared another quote, this time from George Bernard Shaw: “This is the true joy of life. The being used up for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one, being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.”

Roche said he has encountered both types – clods and forces of nature

– in his life.

In terms of the former, Roche recalled a trip to India, where he went to study Gandhi for seven weeks in 1987.

Part of the program involved living like an average citizen of India.

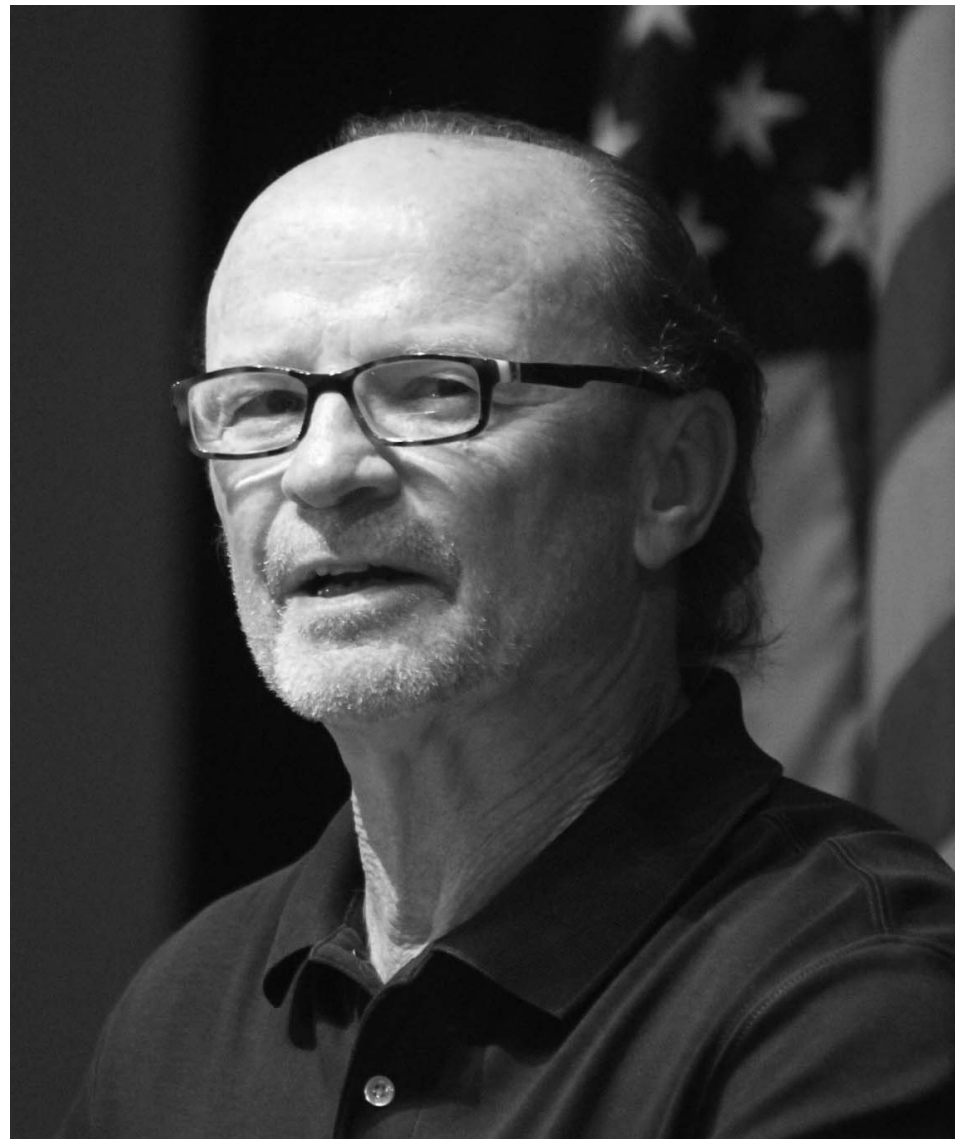
“It’s going to be a rugged seven weeks,” Roche said.

The trip to more than 30 hours, and when they arrived in Bombay it was the middle of monsoon season.

“Finally we get to the hill that leads us up to the Gandhi Freedom Center,” he said. “It’s raining like crazy, and we’re walking up the street, and we realize that we’re walking through sewage because there are open (sewers) on each side of the street.”

Although the idea of the Gandhi Freedom Center “sounded glorious,” Roche said, in reality it was no different than the rest of the slum in which it was located.

“When we get in there,



everything we have is soaked and the people who are hosting us there say that there are no beds,” he said. “It’s a concrete floor, and they have a few provisions that people could use. A few blankets, a couple pillows.”

One woman in the group barked, “I need that pillow.”

“She had a story about her neck, so she grabbed the pillow,” Roche said. “We all settled down on our concrete floor, sleeping not much. We’re wet, we’re tired, we’re anticipating the next seven weeks.”

“In the morning she didn’t look so good. That pillow that she had been sleeping on had fleas all over it, and her face had swelled up the size of a pumpkin. That’s what a

feverish, selfish little clod acts like, and looks like sometimes, too.”

Roche said he can recall encountering a single real “force of nature” in his life – Mother Teresa, whom he saw give a speech at a football stadium in Amherst, MA.

“She was speaking in simple, powerful terms, and (halfway through the speech) I noticed something happening to me that hasn’t happened to me since when listening to a speaker,” Roche said. “I started crying. There were tears running down my cheeks.”

“I looked around. I noticed so many people had the same reaction, and I can feel goosebumps

rising on my arms right now just recalling it,” he said.


How could one person have such enormous power and presence, Roche asked.

“She was not born with it,” he said. “She earned it. That’s a force of nature.”

Roche said she earned it by finding her gifts, turning those gifts over to something larger than herself and living a life of integrity in both large and small things.

“I’m convinced that if you (do these things), that each one of you here has a chance to become forces of nature in your own right,” Roche said. “We need you to be your best. You can do it.”

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