

Thune addresses Girls Staters

Senator advises attendees to stay rooted in their beliefs

By Travis Gulbrandson
travis.gulbrandson@plaintalk.net

Sen. John Thune said that if someone enters politics, they must maintain their character and moral strength.

This was among his messages to the attendees of the 67th annual South Dakota Girls State, which is being held at the University of South Dakota this week.

"If you know who you are and you know what you believe, you stay anchored and grounded in that," Thune said Tuesday morning during a presentation at Aalfs Auditorium. "A lot of times temptations will come at you, or you get buffeted by a lot of various challenges people face in public life, it keeps you kind of grounded."

"That means you've got to stay really rooted in your beliefs and the principles that are important to you," he said.

Thune said the things that keep him most anchored are his family, community and state.

"I've spent a lot of time here in South Dakota, and it's very easy for people to go to Washington, DC, and ... kind of forget what they're about, who they are and what they're there to do," he said.

In short, listen to your conscience and the people you represent, he said.

"Once you lose that, then you just become an unanchored, untethered person, and it's easy to be persuaded and pushed in different directions," Thune said.

The Girls Staters had the opportunity to ask the senator questions following a short speech, among which was what Thune feels is the most difficult aspect of his job.

Thune had two responses. First, he said it is difficult to find enough "bandwidth" to keep up with everything that is going on, between committee memberships, Senate hearings and votes.

"There is so much stuff coming at you every single

day, and so many things to try and stay on top of," he said.

The second answer regarded Thune's "frustration in not seeing a direct result in things that you're doing."

He said he always tells people that in Washington, there is a lot of activity, but not a lot of productivity.

"People are very busy, but they're not getting a lot done, and it's frustrating to me that we don't get more done when you look at the problems that we have in this country," Thune said. "On the other hand, there are things that are very rewarding, very fulfilling."

"When you work on something and you actually do get a chance to see it become a law, something get done, something that will benefit the people that you represent, that's what keeps you motivated," he said.

Thune encouraged all the Girls State attendees to be active during the week, and said he hoped some of them might be inspired to enter politics as a result of it.

Thune himself is an alumnus of the 1978 Boys State.

"I didn't grow up aspiring to go into politics. I grew up in Murdo, SD," he said. "My life began and ended with the city limits of Murdo. It was before the Internet, before cell phones, so it was a world that a lot of you ... probably wouldn't be able to identify with all that much."

His first political inclinations followed a meeting with a congressman when Thune was a high school freshman.

After completing graduate school, that congressman - by then a senator - offered Thune a job on his staff, a position he held for four and a half years.

"I guess what I concluded from that experience was, if the timing and the opportunity were right, it might be something I

would like to do some day, and so it was really that experience that opened that door," he said. "Honestly, it wasn't something I was looking for or looking to do."

At the time of the offer, Thune and his wife had just gotten married and were living in Pierre, but they decided to go to Washington for at least a couple of years.

"What I would say to you about that is, if things come along in your lives that are unexpected opportunities, don't be afraid to walk through that door," Thune said. "Sometimes you may be planning on going a certain direction, and doors will open to you and opportunities will present themselves. Don't be afraid to walk through that door and just see what's on the other side."

He said he hopes "walking through that door" would be something the Girls State attendees would do throughout their lives.

"Your being here means obviously that somebody recognized leadership abilities in you, and so I want to congratulate you for the things that you've already been able to accomplish, and the things that are ahead of you," he said.

These were 'the good old days'

By Parker Knox

In the final episode of "The Office" earlier this month, the character named Andy Bernard spewed forth a bit of profundity when he said, "I wish there were a way to know you were in 'the good old days' before you left them."

I, for one, did. I am fortunate in that I realize that the six years I am now ending have been the most fun years I could have imagined. My "good old days" will always be the years spent in Vermillion but which will have ended by the time May is history.

I'll miss the community theater summer musicals and the announcer's booth at Prentis Park and live music on the patio at Raziels. I'll miss fireworks in September after the VHS homecoming coronation and cinnamon rolls on the lawn outside Concordia Lutheran during the Dakota Days parade and the trains rumbling through town with their whistles blowing at every single crossing.

I'll miss watching the surging power of the current in the river out at Clay County Park and the night each summer when they let everybody's dogs into the swimming pool and our own all-sports radio station. I'll miss thrilling basketball wins over SDSU and the Sound of USD marching band and a university president who has time to stop and chat while out walking his dog.

I'll miss the ever-changing physical landscape at USD and soccer games at Cotton Park and chasing squirrels and rabbits with Oliver on the campus. I'll

miss Spirit Mound and evenings at Pro's when Matt, Jesse and Mike were the bartenders, and the tower of the UCC church.

I'll miss Rhythm in Red and the sight of the Dome from many miles away and the organ in Aalfs Auditorium. I'll miss Jack Powell's Sunday morning coffee and the Al Neuharth Media Award programs and Rotary Club meetings.

"There's a lot of beauty in ordinary things," said the character of Pam Halpert on "The Office" the other night, "and isn't that the point?" Yes, but more than all these things, there have been the people here. I'll miss so many of them most of all.

I'll miss my UCC church family from Steve Miller and Jill and their family to the office staff to the choir to master musicians Anthony and Gretchen Burbach to the Wednesday night kitchen crew to everybody else who worships there. I'll miss my USD music department family from the professors and Laurie in the office to the talented students, all of whom welcomed me into their midst for five years and with whom it was an honor to make music. I'll miss my Vermillion baseball family from the parents and grandparents of the ballplayers to the coaches to the boys on the teams, especially those awesome kids who gave me four state championships about which to write.

I'll miss Nace and Lea at Hy-Vee and all the staff at the public library and the VHS coaches who were so much help in my covering Tanager sports. I'll miss Jim Merrigan in the Prentis Park concession stand and the

boys of the Paradise Fears band and the guys at Bob's Sinclair and the good folks out at Dalesburg Lutheran.

I'll miss Greg Merrigan's voice in the Dome and Kari Jensen's voice at VHS games and Dylan Fischbach, the epitome of a dedicated athlete. I'll miss the guys at Rasmussen Motors who saved my 2000 Taurus from certain death numerous times and Dave Lias who gave me the chance to keep being a sportswriter and Jack and Phyllis Noble.

I'll miss courtside seats at Coyote games with Nancy, Molly, Ann and Doris and the special treat of being here during the basketball careers of the likes of Dylan Grimsley and Eric Hall and Dustin Little and Amber Hegge and Louie Krogman and Alexis Yackley and Charlie Westbrook and Trevor Gruis and the Hoffman twins and Jodie Boss and Tyler Cain and Annie Roche and Mitch Begeman and Ricardo Andreotti and many others.

And all the other so-very-nice people of Vermillion, I'll miss you, too. People like Ardell and Rula Hatch, a very elderly, very delightful couple, always smiling, always cordial despite their advancing ages. And Nick Severson, a loyal "cheerleader" at Coyote games even when the students aren't. And so many others just like them, both old and young.

As Carol Burnett sang at the end of each of her TV shows, "I'm so glad we had this time together; Just to have a laugh and sing a song; Seems we just get started and before you know it comes the time we have to say, 'So long.'"



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