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Noem receives NCLB input from Vermillion educators



Rep. Kristi Noem listens to Superintendent Mark Froke as he explains the challenges the Vermillion School District has in meeting the cumbersome goals of the No Child Left Behind Act.

(Photo by David Lias)

By Travis Gulbrandson

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The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) needs to undergo some revisions to keep schools from being cited for failing to meet its unrealistic expectations.

That was one of the opinions voiced in an informal listening session teachers and administrators of the Vermillion School District had with Rep. Kristi Noem Friday afternoon.

Noem is a member of the National Resources Committee and the Education and Workforce Committee, and traveled to multiple schools in the state to hear the concerns of educators.

The implications of NCLB came up often, and Noem said changes need to be made.

"We can recognize there were some good intentions there, but it doesn't work as far as adding the flexibility that we need to really address some of the issues that our kids have at each school district level," she said.

Under NCLB, each student must make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in reading and math test scores, which school officials said just isn't possible.

"Clearly, the law is broken," said Dr. Mark Froke, Vermillion superintendent. "Next year it's estimated that three-fourths of the schools in the nation will be labeled as 'failing' because the bar has been raised too high. It's just not realistic that schools can reach that level, particularly in 2013-14.

"We're supposed to have everyone at a proficient level in reading and math. It's a wonderful goal, but simply not realistic," he said. "This is what we're struggling with here in our school - to try to reach that bar. But it's just set too high."

Kim Johnson, principal of Austin Elementary, said that some aspects of NCLB are positive, such as the increased accountability that comes with yearly proficiency testing.

"Since this started, we have looked at student performance in a whole new way. We've looked at what really matters, and what instruction is truly most effective," she said.

However, Johnson said the goal becomes harder to reach as the bar is raised toward 100 percent proficiency.

"We'll have to increase our proficient and advanced students by 8-9 percent at an elementary or high school level, and then the next year another 8-10 percent depending on the grade level. That's 15-20 percent over the next two years. That's just an unrealistic jump," she said.

Noem agreed, and said that other officials do, too. "The South Dakota secretary of education was at our meeting yesterday. She was saying by next year 85 percent of schools in South Dakota will be in failing (to meet the standards) based on how quickly the next level keeps ratcheting up," she said.

What needs to happen is a reorientation of focus, she said.

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Lubbers enters no contest plea

By Travis Gulbrandson

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The long-delayed trial of a University of South Dakota professor has been called off.

On Monday, May 23, Charles Lubbers pleaded no contest to charges relating to an incident that took place in October.

Lubbers was charged with first offense simple assault - a Class 1 misdemeanor - as a result of the incident, which took place on a Vermillion football field and involved a fifth-grade boy.

According to the Associated Press, Lubbers - a media professor and former youth football coach - said the boy was trying to tackle another player after the whistle blew during a game.

Lubbers then put his arm in the way of the boy, knocking him to the ground.

In November, Lubbers told USD's campus newspaper, The Volante, that the incident was a simple misunderstanding between him and the boy's mother.

Lubbers was chair of the department of Contemporary Media and Journalism at the time of the incident. He vacated the position Jan. 1, but still is a professor at the university.

The case was set to go to a jury trial scheduled for Monday and Tuesday, but did not as the result of Lubbers' plea.

Previous court appearances in the case were delayed in November, January and April.

Lubbers is scheduled to be sentenced July 5 at the Clay County Courthouse.

- The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Gering to replace Judge Rusch

By Randy Dockendorf

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FREEMAN — As a young girl, Cheryl (Wiedmeier) Gering interviewed a judge. Now, after a distinguished law career, she will become one.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard has appointed the Freeman woman as a First Circuit judge serving southeast South Dakota. She will replace Presiding Judge Arthur Rusch of Vermillion, who is retiring June 8 after serving on the bench since 1994.

Gering's exposure to judges began long before law school. As a seventh grader in the Menno schools, she was assigned to interview a public servant for her civics class.

She knew that she wanted to be a lawyer, so she selected then-Circuit Judge Ernest Hertz of Menno from a list of choices.

"Judge Hertz was very kind to me. I remember him showing me that he had a sketch that an inmate had sent to him," she said. "I was just a seventh grader, but he gave me his undivided attention and shared his time with me."

Gering's interest in the legal profession began at an even earlier age. "Even as young as 10 or 11, I wanted to be a lawyer," she



GERING

said. She pointed to a Yankton attorney, William Schenk, as one inspiration. She recalled, as a young girl, sitting in Schenk's waiting room while her parents met with the attorney to settle her grandfather's estate.

She was fascinated by the hundreds of books lining the shelves.

"I thought, 'You get paid to read books?' What a great job!" she said. "Right then, I knew that was the job for me."

Her desire to become an attorney was fueled even more during high school, when she worked for Menno attorneys Albert Ulmer and Tom Hertz.

"They were kind and reaffirming," she said. "My thought was that this (legal profession) was what I wanted to do."

Gering received an undergraduate degree in political science and criminal justice studies in 1988 from the University of South Dakota. She received her law degree from the University of Iowa in 1991,

graduating in sixth place with high distinction, from a class of 215.

"I went to the University of Iowa for law school, but I had a desire to come back to South Dakota and practice law," she said. "Law students often clerk, or intern, during the summer after their second year of school. I applied at several Sioux Falls firms, and during the summer of 1990 I was with the (Davenport, Evans, Hurwitz & Smith) firm."

She enjoyed the experience so much that she applied to work at the Sioux Falls firm after graduation in 1991. She was hired and has remained in private practice with the firm ever since. She has handled litigation in both the state and federal court systems.

From the start of her law career, Gering desired to become a judge. When Rusch announced his retirement, she applied for the vacancy.

Gering underwent "a fairly arduous process" on the path to her selection, Rusch said.

"The Judicial Qualifications Commission does background checks and investigations on all of the candidates before they determine who is qualified or

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USD group spreading suicide awareness

By Randy Dockendorf

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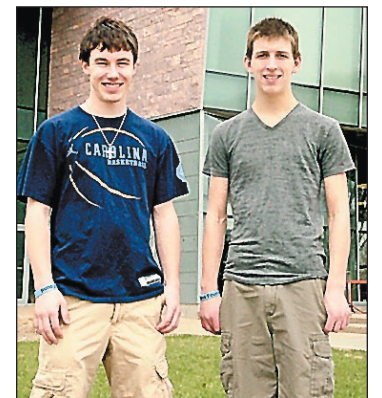
D.J. Smith knows that high school and college are not carefree days for many students.

The University of South Dakota sophomore has seen the hopelessness felt by peers who have suffered depression or have attempted suicide.

"I knew people who were hurting, who felt they had no place to go," he said. "I helped them get out of a dark place in their lives."

Smith saw such episodes of depression and suicide while attending Mitchell High School. He saw more cases this past year as a USD freshman.

Smith did more than just lend an ear. He offered a helping hand that didn't stop with one person. His effort has grown from a Facebook page to a national, non-profit organization.




University of South Dakota sophomores Erik Muckey (left) and D.J. Smith helped create the national, non-profit organization "Lost and Found" and its USD chapter. Smith serves as president and Muckey as treasurer for the group.

(Photo by David Lias)


He founded the awareness group "Lost and Found" two

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