

Noem, Varilek spar during SDPB debate

By David Lias

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Republican U.S. Rep. Kristi Noem and her challenger, Democrat Matt Varilek, made their disagreements on issues known during an hour-long televised debate Thursday, Oct. 18 in the South Dakota Public Broadcasting studio in Vermillion.

Both Varilek and Noem spent much of the hour defending themselves from what they say are false and misleading claims brought up by the opposing campaigns.

The two disagreed right from the start, as the debate began with a listener's question about a proposed reduction in veterans' health care services at the facility in Hot Springs.

"Our veterans have to be our number one priority," Noem said. "They stood up and go to war so that we can all sleep quietly in our beds at night, and that's why I have always supported bills that have funded our veterans' health care, have increased funding when necessary, and that's why we're going to make sure that the Hot Springs hospital continues to provide services to those who truly need it."

Varilek said he is concerned about proposals that call for the closing of the facility in Hot Springs. "I don't think the VA has made the case, sufficiently, that this is the right way to go," he said. "I'm also concerned, though, that part of the reason the VA is trying to do this is to save money because they are under budgetary pressures."

Varilek said he and Noem have differing philosophies when it comes to budgetary policies.

"I believe we need to get serious about our deficit and make some spending cuts where we can, but we also need to look at the revenue side of the equation so we don't have to do radical things like privatize Medicare or make deep cuts into veterans' health care," he said. "My opponent, instead, has taken a different approach and said she'll take a pledge to protect tax breaks for those at the very top of the income spectrum, and try to tackle the deficit through spending cuts alone."

"That requires you do to those very radical things, like privatize Medicare, which I think is going to be very bad for South Dakota seniors, and eventually, it's going to harm veterans' health care, potentially in Hot Springs and across the VA system," he said.

"I've always supported funding our veterans' health care and taking care of them, and making sure that we make more responsible decisions in this country, that we balance our budget and tighten our belts," Noem said.

This opening salvo set the tone for the evening. Noem claimed Varilek is out of touch with South Dakota citizens and supports tax increases for middle class citizens. Varilek continually stated that Noem's record shows she supports tax breaks for the wealthy, and the dismantling of Medicare.

Noem, 40, of Castlewood, said her background as a rancher and former state legislator serves her well in current role as South Dakota's lone



Rep. Kristi Noem (R-SD) and her Democratic challenger, Matt Varilek, listen to instructions from studio personnel prior to the start of their one-hour debate last Thursday in the South Dakota Public Broadcasting facilities in Vermillion.

(Photo by David Lias)

member of the U.S. House.

"We need to have that one voice in the House of Representatives be a fighter, be someone who cares passionately about it, who's one of us, who's lived a normal, everyday life like everybody else here in South Dakota," Noem said. "I'm that person."

Varilek, 37, of Sioux Falls, has roots in Yankton, where he grew up in a low-income family. He said he learned the value of hard work while doing odd jobs to raise money to get through college.

Noem said that it is unfortunate that, during this time of drought, there are no livestock disaster programs in place because Congress failed to pass a farm bill before recessing.

"The best thing that we could possibly do right now is pass a 5-year farm bill. And I know that Matt likes to have his own version of the facts, but the facts are that I was the first one to circulate a letter through the House, asking the leadership team to bring that bill up for a vote. I also worked on a bipartisan basis to push to try to get that bill up for a vote," she said.

Noem said she also voted against the House adjourning in August without taking action on the legislation.

"We absolutely need to have that safety net, and we need to continue to push to get this farm bill done because

it's so critically important to South Dakota right now," she said. "The reason the bill hasn't cleared the House now is because of reforms that we put in food stamps and Democrats simply walked away from the bill."

Varilek said he couldn't help but wonder if the current situation would be different if Noem had been more focused on the farm bill issue earlier instead of "skipping out on so many of those Ag Committee meetings. And then when it came time to work on that discharge petition, you in fact wavered on whether it was a good idea or not. First you said it was, and then you said it wasn't. Now, we see the result."

"When I talk about being a voice for the middle-class families and working people, for me that's not a position, but my passion because of the life I've lived and who we are in this state full of middle-class people," Varilek said.

Noem said she and the vast majority of South Dakotans support the repeal of Obamacare. "We need real health care reform that will drive down costs, and Obamacare is only driving it up."

She added that Obamacare cuts \$716 billion from Medicare to fund a new entitlement program, adding that she would never harm a program that senior citizens in South Dakota depend on.

"The plan that I support for

Medicare takes all of those savings and plugs them right back into Medicare. Medicare is running at a deficit right now. These funds will be used to make sure that Medicare is strengthened for the future," she said.

Varilek said the \$716 billion represents planned savings in Medicare that would not harm benefits.

"My opponent has voted for a plan that would privatize Medicare, give seniors a voucher, but the analysis of that plan made in 2011 said that this plan would cost seniors an extra \$6,400 out of pocket every year, and do that partly to fund huge new tax breaks. I think that's a bad idea," Varilek said.

He also criticized Noem for backing tax plans that would protect millionaires and oil companies.

"We've got someone standing up for the Donald Trumps, Warren Buffetts and Paris Hiltons of the world," the Varilek said.

He added that people making more than \$250,000 annually should no longer receive Bush-era tax breaks, noting that such tax increases combined with spending cuts could cut the deficit while preserving crucial programs.

"I am in this race to be a voice for middle class South Dakotans, working folks, and people who have put in a lifetime of hard work," Varilek said.

"Part of that is retirement security and protecting traditional Medicare."

Noem said ending the Bush-era tax cuts for those earning more than \$250,000 would have a negative impact on many small businesses, and would potentially eliminate 2,200 jobs in South Dakota.

"We need to create an environment in this country that encourages business to hire people, and to expand and reinvest," she said. "I supported a plan to make sure our (tax) rates are competitive with other countries ... what bothers me is my opponent supports a plan that would be extremely detrimental to South Dakota."

"When Matt talks about a balanced approach, what he is really saying is that he wants to raise taxes on potentially 95 percent of our small businesses," Noem said.

"Representative Noem, that is a wild accusation," Varilek replied, "because we are talking about changing income tax rates on those making \$250,000 and above, which covers 1 to 2 percent of South Dakotans. You mention going to ball games and sitting next to people who are making \$250,000 - I don't know what ball games you are going to, but where I go to ball games, I'm sitting next to people who work hard just to pay their bills."

OBITUARIES

Dale Severson

Dale Severson, 90, of Gayville, passed away peacefully in his home on Friday, Oct. 19, 2012.

Dale was born July 29, 1922 in Vermillion, to Charles and Goldie (South) Severson. He attended school at Prairie Belle Country School through eighth grade and graduated from Vermillion High School in 1940.

Dale married Evelyn Erickson in October of 1944 and they farmed in the Vermillion area and he was a security guard at the University of South Dakota until moving to Gayville in 1993. He was an avid bingo player, loved farming, fishing and cooking as well as gardening and music. He especially loved spending time with his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He was a member of the Trinity Lutheran Church in Vermillion and held numerous offices within the Eagles Club including trustee and president.

Thankful for having shared his life are his children, Peggy (Kent) Wathier of Yankton, Doug Severson of Volin, Tammy (Shad) Bratberg of Gayville; seven grandchildren, Melisa (Seth) Veitzer, Jason Nichols, Nick, Adam (Stephanie) and Natalie Severson, Amber and Katie Bratberg; and two great-grandchildren, Noah and Chloe Veitzer. He is also survived by two sisters, Twila Benson and Maxine (Junior) Iverson.

He was preceded in death by his parents and his wife.

A celebration of life service was held at 7 p.m. Wednesday, Oct. 24, at the Hansen Funeral Home in Vermillion with



SEVERSON

visitation one hour prior to the service. A private burial took place on Oct. 25. In lieu of flowers please send donations

to the American Diabetes Association. hansenfuneralhome.com.

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