

~ EDUCATION ~

Good education is essential for a successful democracy and is very useful in helping people climb the socio-economic ladder. Everyone in government always claims to support education, but when you look at what is done, the current system often short changes the education of our children.

In many areas of the country school systems have made circumstances in primary and secondary education so difficult that teachers are leaving the profession, and districts are hiring untrained amateurs to teach our children. It is unreasonable to expect that the results would be good from such a situation. We need to be sure that our primary and secondary educational systems are adequately funded.

Recent trends in education have emphasized teaching to achieve better performance on standardized tests. What is really needed in life is better critical thinking skills. When my daughter was in school I found out about the Montessori method. I was very impressed with the success of this method. The program taught children to work in a collaborative way to solve problems and encouraged creative and critical thinking rather than just memorization. It allows children to self determine which area of the curriculum they are more interested in with guidance. The children to learn the benefits of community collaborations. I have come across many Montessori past students who love the program. The Montessori method is also helping people with dementia.

Children do not learn when information is kept from them. Our educational system should not censor the historical and scientific information that is taught. Verified factual information should not be replaced with speculation or with what we might wish were true. People who do not value democracy would prefer that children be poorly educated and have inadequate critical thinking skills.

The educational system should also include instruction in various skills and trades and not only academic subjects. Not everyone can or should go on to higher education. Some people are better suited to working in non-academic areas. Our society needs people like electricians, plumbers, carpenters, welders, mechanics and other types of skilled workers. Our educational system can help to educate and train people in these skills.

In South Dakota we receive about \$1700 per pupil per year in K-12 education and about \$10,564 per pupil per year from state and local sources. This puts South Dakota among the states that have the highest level per capita of federal spending on K-12 education. With this level of spending, we have a good rate of high school graduation (about 90% of students graduate high school), but our teacher salaries are not competitive and do not provide what would be characterized as a living wage. This contributes to the shortage of qualified teachers for our children. We want to preserve that good rate of graduation, but we will not be able to do it if we don't make sure that qualified teachers are available for our children.

A good percentage of our high school graduates in South Dakota go on to post secondary education. Unfortunately our state does not benefit as much as it could from this because a large percentage of those who graduate from college or graduate / professional schools in South Dakota do not stay in the state after graduation. Part of the reason is that they can often get better paying jobs in other states and part of the reason is that young people embarking on a new career often want to live in a community that has a higher population density and the cultural amenities that go with that environment.

For people who do go on to college and higher education the cost of that education has become prohibitive. Massive debt must be incurred for those least able to pay it. The system that we currently have has been designed to benefit those who lend money for student loans and the educational institutions that benefit from skyrocketing tuition. Certainly it should be possible to develop a better system if our government approached this from the point of view of helping people instead of serving these special interests such as the financial services industry.

The financial services sector is by far the largest element of the South Dakota economy. It is much larger than agriculture in dollar volume but employs far fewer people. The financial services industry also is a very large contributor to John Thune's campaign. Our current senators and congressman devote more attention to catering to the needs of the lenders making education loans than to the needs of ordinary people trying to get ahead and raise a family.

~ We need a senator who will give education the respect that it deserves. ~

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