

The first cracker barrels of the 2010 Legislative Session were held this past weekend and we had great attendance. Approximately 20 residents were on hand Saturday morning in Flandreau to discuss the current session with your District 8 delegation. We heard questions and requests of support for a variety of bills.

Although I don't feel any new taxes will pass this year, the crowd seemed to favor a gas tax for road funding versus increasing registration and licensing fees. I agree that those who use the roads should pay for the roads.

We also discussed the possibility of Flandreau becoming a pilot school for a program designed to revamp the way Native American children are taught in our state. The state has applied for a Federal grant to provide funding for 3 years. I support the idea of exploring our options in Flandreau where some economies of scale may be found in the existing infrastructure and facilities of the Flandreau Indian School. I have already begun contacting school officials and Santee Sioux Tribal Leaders and I would encourage anyone interested to contact me as well.

Saturday afternoon took us to Madison where the conversation switched to the budget. We heard from individuals concerned with fund balances, transferring funds from one entity to another and the call for better business practices at every level.

One bill of concern deals with transferring funds from the Aviation Trust Fund to the General Fund, which would in turn go toward investing in the underground science lab in the Black Hills. Believe me when I say that every single dollar will be reviewed as we try to balance the budget and hold our reserves in tact this year. But, funds moved or cuts made are done in a very prudent manner. If my research is correct, the Aviation funds in question are matched by the Federal Government - 97 cents for every three that we put in. So, the \$3.5 million proposed to be transferred would actually cost the state \$97 million in Federal funds. In my opinion, those funds are relatively safe, as are other funds tied to matching funds of that caliber.

I always appreciate the opportunity during Session to meet with citizens of District 8 face to face to discuss issues of concern. Cracker barrels are a great opportunity for those of us serving you in Pierre to take your input back to the Capitol with us.

My brother asked if I could spend some time with him this past weekend and I told him I had to go to two cracker barrels and that would take most of my Saturday. He spent quite a few years living in Texas before he returned to God's Country and with a puzzled look said, "Cracker barrels are restaurants in the South; you can't be that hungry!" After I explained what cracker barrels were, we decided I should use the phrase "town hall meeting" instead.

So, our next town hall meeting is scheduled for Sunday, February 21st at 3:00 in the Howard American Legion Hall.

Please pray for the men and women of the 211th serving our state and our country.

As always, it is an honor to serve as your State Senator. Please contact me at sen.russellolson@state.sd.us with any advice or concerns.

Respectfully,

Russell Olson
District 8 Senator