



Governor: Education Is Key To Future Employment

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South Dakota, like other Midwestern states, has taken on and overcome a host of challenges.

Gov. Dennis Daugaard, currently in the twilight of his political career, is ready for one more big challenge – workforce development.

He told members of the Vermillion Rotary Club Tuesday that workforce issues in the state pose difficulties for South Dakota employers. The governor spoke at the club's luncheon meeting, held in the Al Neuharth Media Center on the University of South Dakota campus.

"For employers, finding qualified workers is a common difficulty," Daugaard said. "Just ask any employer in South Dakota – they will mention workforce as a challenge, if not 'the' challenge that they face."

The governor was elected chairman of the Western Governors Association, made up of 19 states in the western United States.

"One of the things that the chair gets to do is to pick an issue that all of the governors of those 19 states will get together on, share staff information and share problems and solutions," he said. "The focus I asked us to identify over the next year is workforce."



David Lias/Vermillion Plain Talk

Gov. Dennis Daugaard

Gov. Dennis Daugaard told members of the Vermillion Rotary Club Tuesday that a more-educated workforce is being sought by employers across the nation, and South Dakota is following that trend.

"It's been a focus of mine in years past and it will continue to be a focus this upcoming legislative session and throughout my last year in office," Daugaard said. "It is an area that centers around education because it is clear that post-secondary education is very important in today's job market."

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The governor said a recent Harvard study looked back to education and job trends in 1973. Dugaard said he was a sophomore at USD that year, and the nature of the workforce back then was much different than in it now.

“Those with a high school diploma or less, like my dad, comprised 73 percent of the workforce – nearly three-quarters of the workforce – at that time,” he said, “had a high school diploma or less.”

In the early 1970s, Dugaard said, it was “relatively unusual” for someone to seek an associates or bachelor’s degree at a college or university.

“Last year, conversely, Georgetown University’s Center for Education and Workforce found that today, only 34 percent of job holders are going to have a high school diploma or less,” he said. “Two-thirds are going to have some college or an associate’s degree, or a bachelor’s degree of better.

“The education level of our workforce has gone up pretty considerably,” the governor said. “This trend toward a workforce with more than a high school diploma began in the early 2000s, and has recently accelerated. Jobs for those with no post-secondary training are trending down, and trending down pretty quickly.”

In 2016, Georgetown University’s Center for Education and Workforce also issued a document titled “America’s Divided Recovery.”

“It reported that the economy has added 11.6 million jobs since the recession bottomed out,” Dugaard said. Of that number, 11.5 million, which is 99 percent of those jobs, have gone to workers with at least some post-secondary education.

People with graduate degrees, the study found, gained 3.8 million jobs. Those with bachelor’s degrees gained 4.6 million jobs, followed by those with associate’s degrees, who gained 3.1 million jobs. Workers with a high school diploma or less gained 80,000 jobs.

Dugaard said the study shows that during the recession that began in late 2008, workers with a high school diploma or less lost 5.6 million jobs. Data shows that those with educations that don’t go beyond high school have been “just holding their own” – in other words, not making any gains in job numbers even though the recession has ended.

People who have associate’s degrees lost 1.8 million jobs during the recession, but more than regained them following the recession. People with bachelor’s degrees, Dugaard said, “flattened out and held their own” during the recession in terms of job numbers, but after the recession ended, “they added a considerable number of jobs since then.

“Given this, we want to help keep our kids from dropping out of high school, certainly, but then we need to encourage them to pursue some post-secondary education,” the governor said, “because a high school diploma today is no longer enough.”

South Dakota has a history of encouraging young people to finish high school and seek post-secondary education. The governor shared data showing that back in 2006, there were about 10,500 ninth graders in public schools across the state.

By 2010, 77 percent of those students had graduated; the remainder had dropped out of school. Among those who graduate, about 52 percent go on to post-secondary education of some kind, he said.

“The bottom line is we have quite a few who weren’t finishing high school, and those who were finishing high school weren’t going on. Those who just have a high school credential are going to have a tough go in the job market ... and nationwide and in South Dakota, those who pursue post-secondary education, only about 60 percent complete it.”

South Dakota is making inroads, Dugaard said. Last spring, the state’s high school graduation rate was 90 percent. “But the 60 percent mark is about right in South Dakota,” he said. “We need to encourage our young people to graduate from high school and we need to encourage them, urgently, to pursue and complete some post-secondary training that gives them an opportunity in the job market.”