

Congratulations on the Regents Scholarship

*Robert Duffett, President
Dakota Wesleyan University
February 2001*

Congratulations to Harvey Jewett and Tad Perry of the South Dakota Board of Regents; House Majority Leader Bill Petersen; and all members of the South Dakota House of Representatives.

Recently, the House of Representatives unanimously passed the Regents Scholarship Bill. If passed by the Senate, funded, and signed into law by Governor Rounds, the state will provide up to \$6,000 for some of South Dakota's best students to attend an accredited South Dakota college - private or public.

Many states have similar scholarship programs and the results are clear – they work! Because of the state funding, more high school students choose to attend in-state colleges, private or public. After graduating, they are more likely to find their first job in their home state than students who attended an out-of-state college.

Governor Rounds is consistent and clear: economic development is a key priority of his administration. At the center of any economic development program is an educated and informed citizenry. This program **will** provide increasing numbers of educated and informed citizens. They will lead the way to a better economy and a stronger state.

Is such a bill constitutional if private colleges are included? The South Dakota Supreme Court has not specifically ruled on this issue. I believe that, if challenged, state scholarships for South Dakota private college students will be ruled constitutional for the following reasons.

Precedent - State scholarships are not some new-fangled program. We once had such a program called T.E.C. – the Tuition Equalization Grant. State dollars, along with federal dollars, followed qualified students to attend either a private or public college. There is already precedent for such a program. If it was constitutional then, isn't it constitutional now?

Other states' programs - Over 40 other states have similar state scholarship programs. Many of these states have language in their constitutions about church and state separation that is identical, or very similar, to South Dakota's constitution. In all cases where the constitutionality of these scholarships was challenged, they were found constitutional. If these programs are constitutional in other states, aren't they also constitutional in South Dakota?

The G.I. Bill of Rights - South Dakota's own Tom Brokaw calls the grandparents of today's students "The Greatest Generation." No doubt, enduring the Great Depression and winning World War II developed character, a strong work ethic and patriotism. Could it be, however, that another reason for this generation's greatness was the significant number that attended college?

After these veterans of World War II saved western civilization from tyranny, Uncle Sam "picked up the tab" for millions of G.I.s to go to college. The G.I. Bill of Rights provided for up to 48 months of tuition, books, fees and expenses for any qualified G.I. to go to either a public or private college or university. The result was the best-educated generation in American history.

Constitutional then, constitutional now.

The Federal Government made a great investment when the Greatest Generation went to college. The Regents Scholarship is a great investment in our state **and** in the youth of this generation.