

McGOVERN NEWSLETTER
LEADERSHIP | SERVICE | RESEARCH | SOCIAL JUSTICE

Greetings from the McGovern Center!

It's been a season filled with inspiring conversations, community connections and leadership development. Here's what we've been up to:

A Better South Dakota - ABSD

The McGovern Center has launched a new student club called "A Better South Dakota" (ABSD). In addition to organizing several service projects, the group recently traveled to Pierre to observe and participate in the legislative process (see article below).

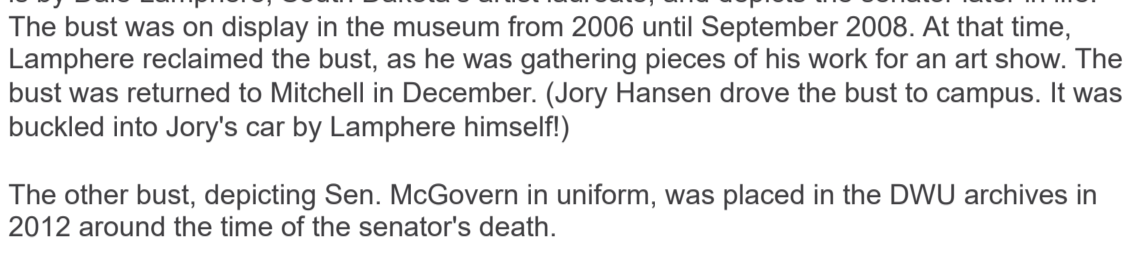
Closer to home, the club has taken on a creative and practical civic project: encouraging the city of Mitchell to adopt an official city flag. It's an achievable goal that gives students a meaningful way to contribute to the community.

Recently, Jackson Ahlers, a freshman from Dell Rapids, S.D., president of ABSD, presented our proposal for a Mitchell city flag to the city council. He made a compelling case and shared a sample design created by sophomore Rosalie Wehlander, Esmond, S.D. The proposal was well received. Mitchell mayor Jordan Hanson thanked Ahlers and offered both encouragement and guidance on how to move the idea forward.

A Better South Dakota is advised by McGovern Center Director Joel Allen and Director of Library Resources Lori Wehlander.



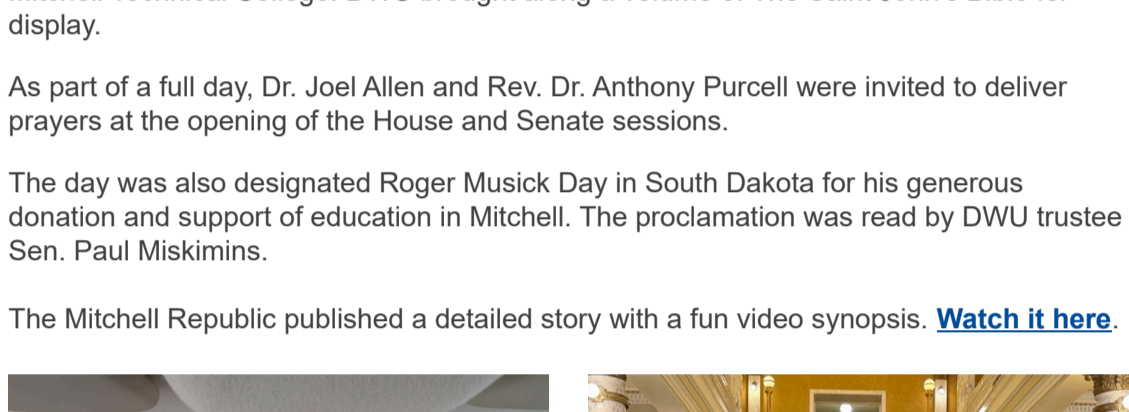
The club is also working to encourage South Dakota legislators to consider improving the state flag. Currently, South Dakota is the only state whose flag spells out its name twice. Despite the nickname "The Mount Rushmore State," the flag does not include an image of Mount Rushmore, and the central medallion is difficult to discern. Below is the new flag design proposed by the club.



McGovern Statues Displayed in Museum

The McGovern Legacy Museum now displays two busts of Sen. George McGovern. One is by Dale Lamphere, South Dakota's artist laureate, and depicts the senator later in life. The bust was on display in the museum from 2006 until September 2008. At that time, Lamphere reclaimed the bust, as he was gathering pieces of his work for an art show. The bust was returned to Mitchell in December. (Jory Hansen drove the bust to campus. It was buckled into Jory's car by Lamphere himself!)

The other bust, depicting Sen. McGovern in uniform, was placed in the DWU archives in 2012 around the time of the senator's death.



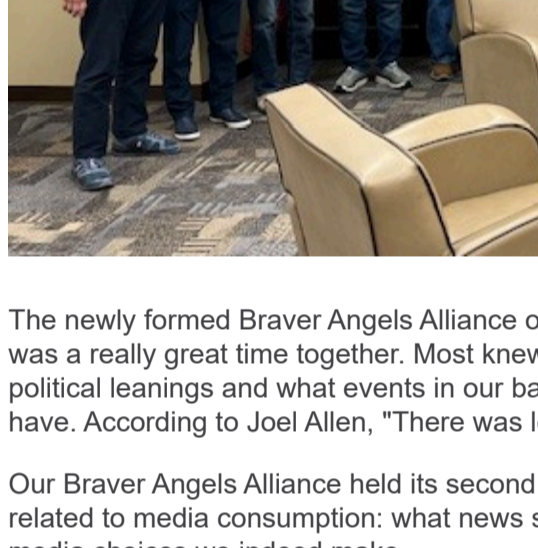
DWU Faculty, Staff, Students Attend Mitchell Day in Pierre

A group of faculty and students went to Pierre as a part of "Mitchell Day at the Legislature" on Thursday, Feb. 19. Also attending were the Leadership Mitchell class and a group from Mitchell Technical College. DWU brought along a volume of The Saint John's Bible for display.

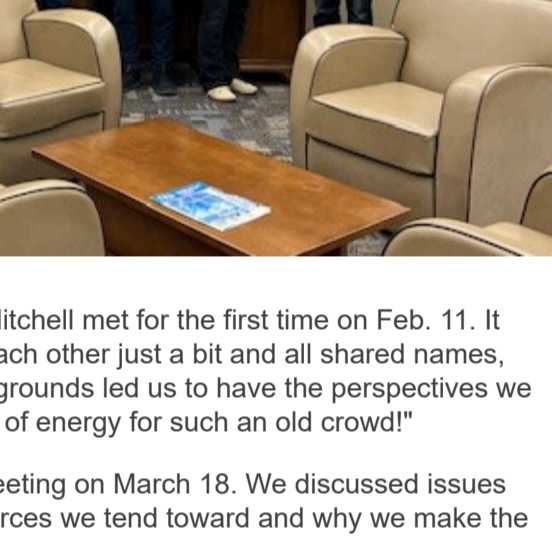
As part of a full day, Dr. Joel Allen and Rev. Dr. Anthony Purcell were invited to deliver prayers at the opening of the House and Senate sessions.

The day was also designated Roger Musick Day in South Dakota for his generous donation and support of education in Mitchell. The proclamation was read by DWU trustee Sen. Paul Miskimins.

The Mitchell Republic published a detailed story with a fun video synopsis. [Watch it here.](#)

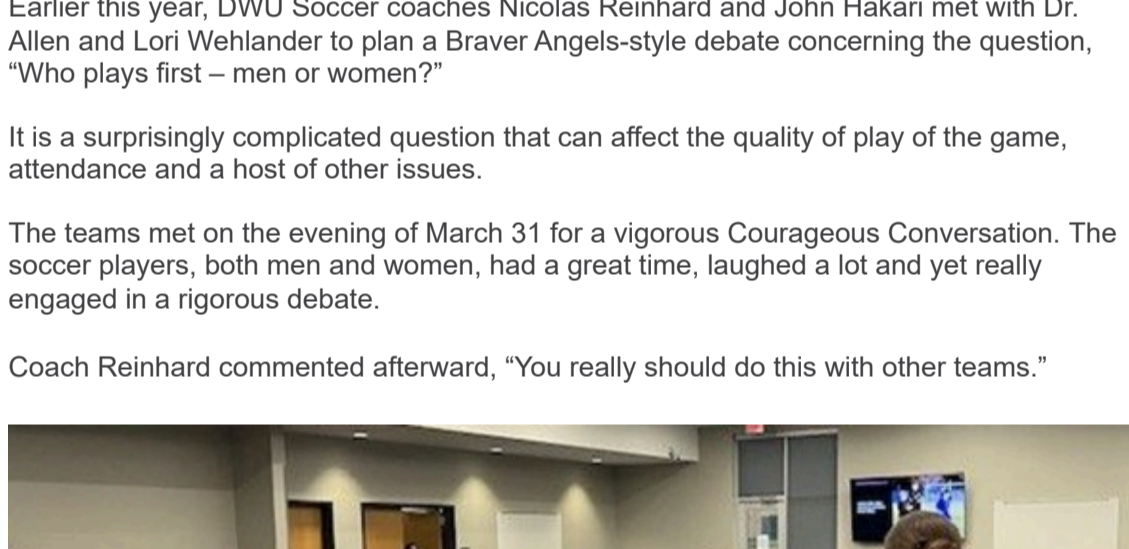


The DWU group on their way to Pierre for Mitchell Day at the Legislature.



This is the full Mitchell contingent minus the DWU group who had departed prior to the group photo.

Braver Angels Alliance Holds Inaugural Meeting



The newly formed Braver Angels Alliance of Mitchell met for the first time on Feb. 11. It was a really great time together. Most knew each other just a bit and all shared names, political leanings and what events in our backgrounds led us to have the perspectives we have. According to Joel Allen, "There was lots of energy for such an old crowd!"

Our Braver Angels Alliance held its second meeting on March 18. We discussed issues related to media consumption: what news sources we tend toward and why we make the media choices we indeed make.

Braver Angels is a nation-wide depolarization agency which "brings Americans together to bridge the partisan divide and strengthen our democratic republic." The next meeting will be on Wednesday, May 13 at 7 p.m. in the McGovern Conference Room. All are welcome to come. Contact [Joel Allen](#) for more information.

Men's and Women's Soccer Teams Participate in "Courageous Conversation"

Earlier this year, DWU Soccer coaches Nicolas Reinhard and John Hakari met with Dr. Allen and Lori Wehlander to plan a Braver Angels-style debate concerning the question, "Who plays first – men or women?"

It is a surprisingly complicated question that can affect the quality of play of the game, attendance and a host of other issues.

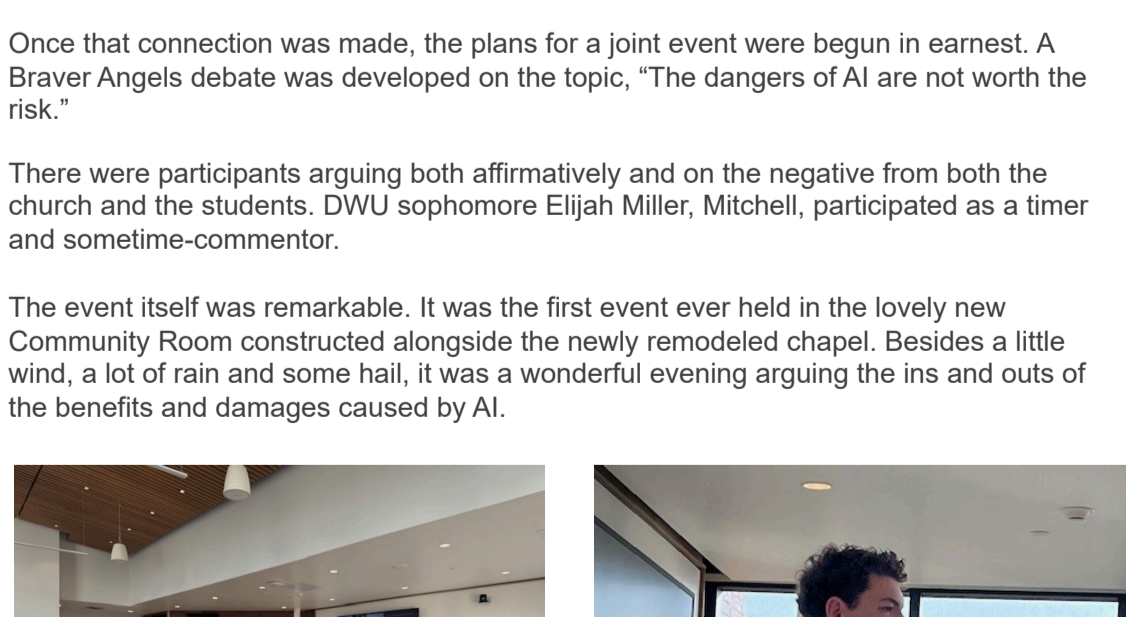
The teams met on the evening of March 31 for a vigorous Courageous Conversation. The soccer players, both men and women, had a great time, laughed a lot and yet really engaged in a rigorous debate.

Coach Reinhard commented afterward, "You really should do this with other teams."



Data Center Debate Moderated

Dr. Joel Allen had the privilege of planning and moderating a Braver Angels-style debate with the Downtown Rotary club in Sioux Falls, S.D. The topic was, "Is the construction of hyper-data centers in South Dakota beneficial for the state and its economy?" We had two pro-speeches, two con, and one provisional pro/con speech. The event went very well, and the Rotary president is interested in organizing another Braver Angels-style debate.

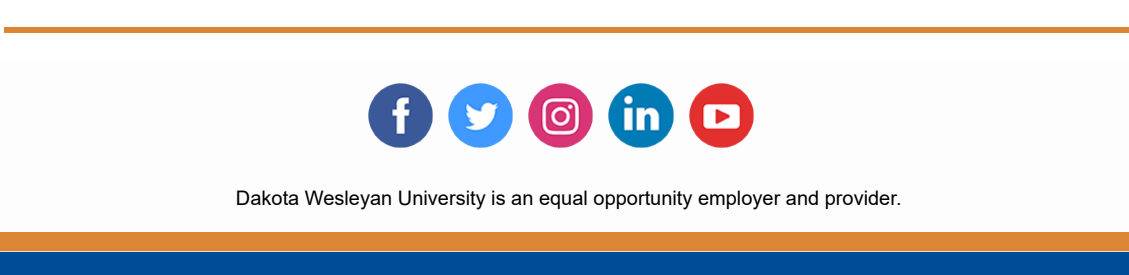


DWU Stark Lecturer Brendan Murphy Discusses "Faith, Failure and the Moral Reckoning of Antisemitism"

On April 9, DWU welcomed the 2026 Stark Lecturer, Brendan Murphy. Joel and Kitty Allen first heard Murphy speak at the Chautauqua Institute in August 2025 and decided on the spot to bring him to DWU as our Stark Lecturer. He did not disappoint.

Murphy is a schoolteacher at the Stark School in Atlanta, Ga., and a respected speaker on the history of antisemitism. He spoke about the ways that hatred of Jews was built into the architecture and iconography of the medieval world. Images representing Jewish people were placed in prominent locations in cathedrals, often depicting Jews as responsible for the death of Jesus and therefore cursed by the Almighty. Their power and dignity were portrayed as condemned by God himself.

Murphy reminded us that while many modern Christians do not consciously view Jews in such a hateful light, our ignorance of this history creates space for new forms of hatred and falsehood to emerge.

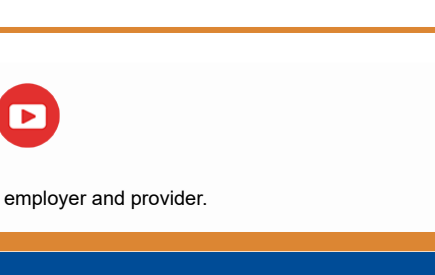


DAKOTA WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY
1200 W. University Ave. • Mitchell, SD 57301 • www.dwu.edu

DWU Stark Lecture
Brendan Murphy
"Faith, Failure and the Moral Reckoning with Antisemitism"

April 9, 2026
7 p.m.
DWU Sherman Center
www.dwu.edu/live

This event is free and open to the public.



Allen Takes Braver Angels to Sioux Falls College and Church

On Monday, April 13, Dr. Joel Allen, conducted a Braver Angels event at Augustana Lutheran University in Sioux Falls. The debate combined parishioners from Our Savior's Lutheran Church and Augustana students.

Discussion of a joint event began with Dr. Allen and Augustana campus pastor Ann Rosendale discovering that the McGovern Center and Augustana University's Campus Ministries are the only two organizations in South Dakota which are formal members of the Braver Angels Network.

Once that connection was made, the plans for a joint event were begun in earnest. A Braver Angels debate was developed on the topic, "The dangers of AI are not worth the risk."

There were participants arguing both affirmatively and on the negative from both the church and the students. DWU sophomore Elijah Miller, Mitchell, participated as a timer and sometime-commentor.

The event itself was remarkable. It was the first event ever held in the lovely new Community Room constructed alongside the newly remodeled chapel. Besides a little wind, a lot of rain and some hail, it was a wonderful evening arguing the ins and outs of the benefits and damages caused by AI.

The Spirit of McGovern Lives On

At the McGovern Center, we continue to nurture **leadership, service, and civic renewal**—helping students and communities embody the spirit of **George McGovern's** vision for democracy rooted in compassion and courage.

Thank you for your continued support!

Dr. Joel Allen
Director of the McGovern Center

Warm regards,
Joel Allen
Director, The McGovern Center for Leadership and Public Service

