



## A MESSAGE TO OUR STUDENT PAGE USERS

State legislatures are important institutions. Never have they been more important than in recent years as they find themselves pinned between federal mandates and local needs. Issues once addressed only in the halls of Congress are now being debated in state capitols throughout the nation. Programs once funded with federal dollars are now being funded through state and local budgets. Local governments increasingly look to the states for assistance and finances. Like never before, the decisions made by state legislatures impact the citizenry.

For our democratic system of government to prosper, it is vital that citizens get involved in government at all levels. Involvement in government doesn't necessarily include running for office or helping candidates. It does, however, include being familiar with the process, being informed on the issues, and voting for those candidates we feel will best serve and represent us.

This page attempts to explain the state legislative process in South Dakota. At time when citizen apathy is on the rise across the country, it is our hope that those learning from it will translate their

knowledge into involvement. Our system depends on it.

When compared to holding most jobs in the private sector, serving in the Legislature provides few advantages. Legislators are not in government for the money. In fact, they earn very little. The compensation is low by design. In that way, people accept the challenge of public service for reasons other than financial ones. They serve for a few years and return to private life. Others with new ideas and goals replace them.

While in office, lawmakers face constant public scrutiny. They make most of their decisions in public meetings. Their votes are permanently recorded. They bear the burden of spending taxpayer dollars wisely. As candidates for the office, they disclose all their financial affairs to the public. They work hard to earn the public trust.

Despite all of the demands and pressures, however, people continue to seek legislative office. They have the desire to help others and to make a contribution. Their work is rewarding to them. They accept the challenge of public service, and our state is a better place because of their efforts.