



News Release

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Regents Applaud USD President on Free Speech Action

PIERRE, S.D. – Board of Regents' President Kevin V. Schieffer today commended Sheila Gestring, president of the University of South Dakota, for her prompt and decisive action over the weekend to investigate whether the Board of Regents' new Freedom of Expression policy was violated in connection with a "Hawaiian Day" event at the USD School of Law.

"The board has made it very clear in policy that neither professors nor administrators can block or unduly interfere with free speech simply because some might find it offensive," Schieffer said. "While it is important to conduct a careful investigation to ensure we understand all of the facts, it is also important to send a strong and prompt message that our freedom of expression policies will be enforced on the campuses. President Gestring has done that. We look forward to a full accounting of this case based on a record of factual findings rather than unsubstantiated reports."

Schieffer added that this case presents a good opportunity to articulate and test the robustness of the Board of Regents' policy. "No one should be afraid to discuss all aspects of a controversial issue, including educators and administrators. But using administrative authority to inhibit free speech would cross a line that is clearly defined in our policy, and should not be tolerated," he said.

"We do no service to our students by indoctrinating them with 'political correctness' run amok," Schieffer said. The board's policy states that "it is the Board's fundamental commitment to the principle [of Free Speech] that viewpoints may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the institutions' community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. Controversial speech and robust debate are expected and valued at the institutions."

Schieffer added that the board looks forward to a clear and comprehensive report from USD on whether any administrative or other official action involved in the USD incident violated free speech policy or not, along with supporting factual detail and applied policy determinations. "We need to know that all of our institutions are effectively communicating and enforcing free speech," Schieffer said. "Regardless of the outcome, this case presents a good opportunity to make sure that happens."