

**Robert T. Wagner**  
**Citation for the Honorary Degree**  
**Doctor of Public Service**

The South Dakota Board of Regents recognizes the exceptional contributions of a retiring president by conferring on him an honorary doctorate. Never before in the one hundred-year history of the Board has such recognition been given to an individual who served the people of South Dakota as a professor and as a leader within the system of higher education.

Robert T. Wagner richly deserves such recognition. His work as President of South Dakota State University fixes a high standard by which institutional leadership should be measured.

President Wagner's leadership manifested itself on multiple levels. His early efforts as president healed an institutional rift with suspicion and forged a consensus among constituent groups to support his principled, carefully documented, open, accountable decision-making style. Throughout his presidency, President Wagner played a decisive role in support of Board initiatives to recast decision-making procedures for the whole university system in a like mold.

President Wagner saw, as few presidents before him had seen, that the surest way to preserve the advantages of his university lay, not through recourse to political supporters, but through the systematic introduction of sound public administration practices. Well administered universities stood to benefit so long as academic programs and system policies were reviewed in terms of quality, contributions to state welfare and fiscal requirements. Ever conscious that South Dakota had but limited resources to devote to the support of higher education, President Wagner recognized that reliance on raw political power to advance one institution, at the expense of others, would lead only to strife among institutions and communities. He knew that such strife would inevitably erode public confidence in all state universities. President Wagner understood that his university and the system could only prosper if they could document for the public and public officials that scarce resources had been allocated wisely and expended efficiently to produce demonstrable results to benefit the public.

President Wagner understood how the presidency of the land-grant university fit into the affairs of the state as a whole. He recognized his obligation to the people of South Dakota to administer the university for their benefit, not merely for that of certain institutional constituencies. Still, however much his sure perception of the obligations and opportunities of the presidency contributed to his achievements, President Wagner had to draw upon other ranges of skills to communicate his vision to often-skeptical listeners and to translate it into practice.

President Wagner demonstrated a consummate ability to work with people. Assuming office in troubled times, President Wagner won the confidence of the diverse groups that carry out or support the work of the land grant university. Able to listen to disparate views, quick to find effective means to address reasonable concerns, mindful of the need to acknowledge genuine concern or effort, eloquent and sincere when expressing his thoughts and proposals, sure in his selection of subordinates, exacting in his expectations for professional accomplishment and prudent when entrusting responsibilities to others, President Wagner transformed skepticism into commitment, and he provided institutional supporters productive channels to contribute to the well being of their university, while supporting the cause of higher education throughout the state. At the same time, he shaped administration whose accomplishment and consistent professionalism earned respect and emulation within the state and nationally.

President Wagner evidences a rare combination of genuine statecraft and true skill in working with people. A South Dakota native, his legacy of public service to the people of South Dakota honors them and leaves in place decision-making practices that will stand the test of time. Such leadership merits recognition, and it is with great pride that the Board confers upon Robert T. Wagner the degree of Doctor of Public Service *honoris causa*.