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SIOUX FALLS, SOUTH DAKOTA

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TODAY'S BRIEFING



Fire kills 2 children, hurts 2

Neighbor aided two off roof, but smoke kept him from saving others

BY PETER HARRIMAN
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Two elementary school-aged children died, and two other people remain in critical condition after a house fire early Saturday at 212 S. Willow Ave.

Sioux Falls law enforcement officials have not released the names of the victims but have determined the fire was accidental, and no criminal action was involved. A family of eight occupied the house. According to neighbors, these residents included a woman in her 50s, two daughters and their children, ages kindergarten to high school. The family had lived in the house for about 10

years. The phone is registered to Oanh Thi Thach.

At 4:37 a.m., Sioux Falls Fire Rescue responded to the blaze that apparently began in a rice cooker near a stove. Before firefighters arrived, a neighbor, Tim Hall, of 1625 W. 10th St., rescued two of the occupants who had crawled out of a second-story bedroom onto a porch roof. Three other occupants were able to escape through the front door. Fire rescue crews removed three people while searching the home.

"Shortly after four this morning, the mom ran down, beat on our door, and woke my wife and me, and hollered her

kids were in the house," Hall says.

"I got dressed and ran here. Two kids were on the back roof. I got them down. The daughter was inside. I tried going in, but the smoke was too intense."

Hall said by that time, Sioux Falls Police had arrived, and he and officers tried to enter the house a second time and were again turned away by smoke and heat.

Neighbor Burl Watne, of 208 S. Willow Ave., said that while the Vietnamese family had limited English skills, "they



VAL HOEPPNER / ARGUS LEADER
 Friends and firefighters gather around a relative of the victims in a fatal fire Saturday at 212 S. Willow Ave.

See FIRE, page 5A

OPINION

Does the city need an events center?

► That's the question we asked. And we got responses from readers, as well as the pro and con view of what a new center would mean for the future of Sioux Falls. **9B**

LIFE

Dave Barry's Christmas Guide

► Sure, these gift suggestions are odd — who really needs a toilet poncho or a campfire butt warmer anyway? But the best part is that all these odd gifts are real — and hilarious. **1F**

LOCAL & REGION

Oglala Sioux leader takes the helm

► Cecilia Fire Thunder took charge Saturday as president of the tribe, and she's got plenty of work ahead of her — namely, that she presides over one of the nation's poorest counties, and her opponent has said the election she won was corrupt. **1B**

SPORTS

SDSU women lose close game at USC

► The Jackrabbit women's basketball squad fell to 6-3 on the season after losing 66-59 to the Southern Cal Trojans in their first matchup. SDSU returns home Saturday after an eight-game road trip. **1C**

BUSINESS

As corn piles up, so does its benefit

► This year's record corn harvest means that farmers reap the benefits of a healthy crop. Retailers and equipment dealers also see the benefits. **1D**

NATION & WORLD

► UKRAINE POISONING: The mystery illness that has left Ukrainian opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko's formerly handsome face scarred and pitted was no disease — it was dioxin poisoning, doctors say. 3A

► SOLDIER SENTENCED: A U.S. soldier was sentenced to three years in prison for killing a wounded Iraqi teen, the military said Saturday. Also, insurgents staged attacks in several cities, killing at least 10 Iraqis and wounding 14 U.S. soldiers. **6A**

A TALK WITH TOM DASCHLE

'IT WAS ALL WORTH DOING'

Senator says he won't lobby or seek office

BY JENNIFER SANDERSON
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As Sen. Tom Daschle prepares to leave Capitol Hill, with more friends and more enemies than when he first climbed the granite steps 26 years ago, he is clear on this: He will not return as a lobbyist.

Nor will he return as a candidate for any office, president on down.

"I am totally confident and comfortable in the notion that elected politics is something I'm putting behind me," Daschle said in a Friday telephone interview with the *Argus Leader* from Washington, where he will continue to live.

He said he has been approached by law and investment firms and said that more writing is in his future.

In his first interview with South Dakota media since conceding defeat to Republican John Thune, Daschle carried in his voice both disappointment and determination.

He's determined to keep his promise to "continue to work for the state of South Dakota and the people of our state, so long as I have an opportunity to do so."

However, that promise will be kept outside elected office. Non-profit advocacy agencies, think tanks and consulting firms are only a few of the ways Daschle could continue to affect public policy.

He is disappointed that South Dakotans voted him out of the Senate, but he said, "I'm not dwelling on my disappointment."

When Daschle leaves the Hill, he will take with him boxes of files and photos as well as the awkward prefix of "former" and, after 26 years, the private comfort that he did not compromise what led him there in the first place.

"I've always said to my family that whenever that time comes, when I have to leave and walk out, I want to walk out with my head held high," Daschle said. "All that I've done and all that I've attempted to do has been done with that in mind."

See DASCHLE, page 4A



MATTHEW CAVANAUGH
 GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

Leader faced 'very turbulent time'

QUESTION: People obviously are eager to hear from you — your thoughts on the recent election and what's ahead for you and your party. What message do you want to give them?

ANSWER: The most important message I have is, "Thank you." Thank you for giving me the opportunity for 26 years to serve you and to live out my passion, to experience amazing things that very few people have the opportunity to experience. For a kid from Aberdeen, South Dakota, it really is

beyond anything I could've imagined as a young student from my hometown. So I am very grateful to the people of South Dakota for their support and for the extraordinary opportunities they've given me.

Q: Most of the career possibilities you mention seem slanted toward the East Coast. Will you remain living in Washington? Should South Dakotans expect to see much of you?

A: Absolutely. I plan to come home frequently to Aberdeen. We'll always keep our home there. My mother lives in the house I grew up

MORE ONLINE

For the complete interview, log on to www.argusleader.com.

in, and that's a home I care a lot about. I intend to find many different ways in which I can be fully engaged in both professional and maybe nonprofit opportunities in South Dakota. Of the few decisions I have made, that's one of them.

Q: What kept you from running

See Q&A, page 4A

Kids vs. seniors? S.D. faces shifting demands

BY JON WALKER
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Shirley Grimes visited her mother for lunch every day for 15 years. Last Memorial Day weekend, she stopped in for another reason — to help her move to an east Sioux Falls assisted living center.

"She was not at all happy" to give up her independence, Grimes, 62, said of 84-year-old Elva Deckert. "I now take her out two to three times a week, but when it's time to go back, she doesn't want to go back."

On the other side of town, Grimes, a county Extension secretary, enjoys watching her granddaughter, Amanda Pederson, 16, play soccer and lead cheers for Roosevelt High School. She also is pleased to see Amanda's brother, 6-year-old Nicholas, getting started at Discovery Elementary School.

Her generational tug "between my mom and my grandkids" is the same tug South Dakota now must navigate to meet the expanding needs of a growing elderly population and a shrinking group of schoolchildren.

These two demographic glaciers have been advancing across the state for a half-century. But last week, they sparked fresh controversy when Gov. Mike Rounds told how his new budget would change who gets what money to address competing needs.

Education still will get more than half of every dollar in the budget Rounds sends to the Legislature in January, but the school share will drop as the state channels more money into Medicare, Medicaid and helping low-income families.

Rounds says he is keeping his commitment to schools by giving them a 2.9 percent hike in money — a boost that's greater

MORE ONLINE

To see statewide enrollment figures since 1985, log on to www.argusleader.com.

See SPENDING, page 5A

MEDIAN AGE IN S.D.

Here's a look at the median age of South Dakotans for selected years.

1960	27.7
1970	27.4
1980	28.9
1990	32.4
1995	34.2
2000	35.6

Source: State Data Center at USD's Business Research Bureau

INDEX

- Annie's Mail 5F
- Business 1D
- Celebrations 5B
- Classified E
- Comics Inside
- Crossword 16E
- Horoscope 6E
- Jobs E
- Lotteries 1B
- Movies 6A
- Nation 3,7,9A
- Obituaries 6B
- Opinion 8B
- TV Connections

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Avera McKennan





Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle speaks on the phone in his Capitol Hill office on Friday. In recent weeks, Daschle has overseen the shutdown of five offices, three in South Dakota and two in Washington.

MATTHEW CAVANAUGH
GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

Daschle: Law, investment, writing opportunities possible

Continued from 1A

When reflecting on his loss, he won't speculate on why a slim majority of South Dakotans — 51 to 49 percent — thought it was time for change.

Their decision means Daschle is out of a job for the first time since 1978, when he left his spot as an aide to then-Sen. Jim Abourezk and won a place in the U.S. House. Certainly, he would have preferred not to make history as the first Senate leader in more than a half-century to lose his seat. The race was South Dakota's most expensive in history and the costliest 2004 Senate match nationwide. It also was among the country's most bitterly contested.

'Sense of achievement'

All things considered, Daschle is convinced he did the best he could in the time he had.

"It was all worth doing," he said. "Could I go back and find many mistakes and things I could've done better? Absolutely. Clearly, in 26 years, it was far from perfect. There are things you know you could've done better or in a way that might have been different, but that doesn't take away from the larger sense of satisfaction and gratitude, that sense of achievement."

Daschle will have no shortage of new opportunities. While he has been approached by law and investment firms, he won't name names. His 2003 book, a personal account of the 107th Congress, got mostly favorable reviews, and he said more writing is in his future. He also plans to log speaking events, which can bring tens of thousands of dollars apiece for in-demand personalities.

The money won't be the driving factor, though. Daschle's wife, Linda Hall Daschle, earned nearly \$750,000 last year as a lobbyist for major airlines and aviation companies.

Thune's campaign made her job a critical focus, despite Thune's own lobbying background and her rule to petition only those on the House side. As her husband leaves the Senate, she'll broaden her scope free of a potential conflict of interest. Her work requires her to stay in Washington, and the couple will keep the large home so prominently displayed by Republican-financed Web sites and direct-mail pieces during the campaign.

Serving public interest

Daschle's pass on a lobbying career of his own might surprise some who've seen other lawmakers find that niche. But those within his closer circles, including aides, didn't expect him to follow that path. As a party leader in the Senate for nearly a decade, Daschle could be in a position to pursue more public-spirited interests next year.

"For a former majority leader, you're in a somewhat different position than a rank-and-file member," said Norm Ornstein, an analyst with the nonpartisan American Enterprise Institute. "You're a little bit more deliberative about the kinds of things that you do."

Daschle's immediate predecessor as Democratic leader, former Sen. George Mitchell of Maine, stayed active in policy after he retired from politics in 1994. Mitchell helped negotiate peace settlements in Northern Ireland and the Middle East. He also set up several institutes dedicated to education and the environment in his home state. He's now chairman of the Disney company.

Longtime House Democratic leader Dick Gephardt, a Missourian who is

close to Daschle, plans to start a public policy institute at Washington University as he retires to his hometown of St. Louis.

Several observers and political operatives said they thought Daschle could wind up joining a think tank in Washington to focus on issues important to South Dakota. Efforts toward improving health care, the rural economy and renewable energy resources all would allow Daschle to use and build on the expertise he's gained in Congress.

Daschle would say only that he's talked with a variety of groups in South Dakota, Washington and New York. He dismissed a rumor from weeks past that the administration had hinted at a Cabinet post as a nod toward bipartisanship.

"The answer is no," said Daschle, who was surprised to first see the item in a conservative writer's national column. "I doubt very much that it would be offered or that I would consider it."

At South Dakota State University, where Daschle's 1969 graduation made him his family's first college success story, president Peggy Miller said she hoped Daschle would stay involved in national and international affairs.

"In or out of office, the skills and experience of men like Tom Daschle are still desperately needed if we're going to have a better, safer nation," Miller said.

Daschle has spent much of the past few weeks working on transitional leadership with close friend Sen. Harry Reid, the new minority leader from Nevada. Concerned with finding jobs for his large staff, he's also overseeing the shutdown of five offices, three in South Dakota and two in Washington.

Congress wrapped up for the year Thursday with a vote on reforming the nation's intelligence agencies. Daschle joined an overwhelming majority of bipartisan lawmakers in both chambers who voted yes.

Daschle, labeled an obstructionist throughout the recent campaign, said, "I don't think anyone should feel apologetic for opposing another leader within the republic if you think that leader is wrong."

Republican pollster Frank Luntz thinks the accusation is more complex in Daschle's case. Daschle didn't block only Bush's agenda, he blocked his shot at re-election by contradicting himself, Luntz said.

"The whole point was, there were two Tom Daschles. There was the Daschle who was raising money for the Democrats, who was extreme, even ugly at times. Then there was the Tom Daschle of South Dakota: very kind, very soft-spoken, very decent and very powerful," said Luntz, who turns to the "Seinfeld" sitcom for his final analysis. "A Daschle divided against itself cannot stand, as George Costanza would say."

Excited about future

Daschle said he stayed true to his South Dakota roots and doesn't feel betrayed by the state's voters. They're a more progressive bunch than they're given credit for, he said, or they wouldn't have sent him to Washington for more than a quarter-century.

"Am I disappointed? Absolutely, I'm disappointed," he said. "But I'm not dwelling on my disappointment or inability to continue to serve because of how grateful I feel and how excited I am about the future. I'm not young anymore, but I'm not old."

Daschle, 57, felt that disappointment first for his family and, soon afterward,

Q&A: 'Able to touch the lives of so many'

Continued from 1A

earlier for the presidency? Not everyone buys the explanation in your book — that you simply weren't ready not to be a senator. Do you think your decision not to seek the Democratic nomination had any effect on the outcome of your face-off with (Sen.-elect John) Thune?

A: I don't know. Only time will tell. I'm sure there'll be a lot more talk even than it's really worth. What I said at the time is really true. I considered what I wanted to do and where I felt the most comfortable. As much as I would've enjoyed the challenge of a presidential campaign, all things considered, I had the best job politically and personally in the country. Why would I want to give that up?

I was also reticent about walking away from my caucus when I felt they needed me. Two years ago, we'd just come off a loss, the first loss of numbers in my caucus that I'd experienced as a leader. I just didn't feel right about walking away from South Dakota and walking away from my caucus at a time when I felt, in both cases, I was needed. I would've been putting personal political ambition ahead of responsibility."

Q: How do you want to be remembered on the Hill?

A: I would like to be recognized for trying to do the right thing. While many people might disagree with some of the positions I've taken, I hope they would never question my motives or my determination to do what I've done and to do it with the professionalism required. So that's how I've looked at it.

I look back, and I was leader during a very turbulent time in our country. I look back at the anthrax attack on my office, 9-11, the impeachment (of President Bill Clinton), a 50-50 Senate — the first time in history that that happened. We had some very, very challenging times that really required leadership and partnership with my Republican counterparts. I hope history will judge me well.

for his staff. By 3 a.m. on Nov. 3, the day he'd make his concession speech, he knew the numbers weren't going to turn late for him the way they did for Sen. Tim Johnson two years earlier. Both Democrats faced the same opponent.

"There isn't any way to describe it unless you've had the experience, which I wouldn't recommend," Daschle said. "You go through the whole range of emotions."

Daschle acknowledges anger, resignation and even relief to have the campaign behind him in those first hours.

Underneath, though, there was the truth of knowing none of that would change what needed to be said to those who'd backed him. It's why, more than a month later, he brushes aside questions about what tipped the polls in Thune's favor. He'll leave the second-guessing to the pundits and his rawest feelings for quiet talks around the supper table.

"I've had many things for which I have really worked hard to accomplish, and one is discipline," Daschle said. "I think you need to be disciplined to keep these emotions in check and make those decisions. One of those was not to replay the election or the campaign

Q: What's your proudest moment in Washington?

A: I always tell people that in my early years, I wanted to be the political equivalent of an offensive quarterback. Most of my life I've been the equivalent of a defensive lineman. Because this hasn't been a particularly activist time in government. I got excited in the new frontier and believed government could play a vital role in making life better and creating opportunity. ... I still believe that today. Nothing has detracted from that view, and there's so much more we can and should do.

My proudest moment? I look back with immense pride and satisfaction on how we've been able to touch the lives of so many South Dakotans. They're still contacting our office. ... In some cases, they went so far as to say we saved their lives. You don't have to have many of those conversations to think that of everything we've done, it's those moments that have meant the most.

Q: Do you think you lost because voters believed Thune would do a better job or because they believed they needed to get you out of office?

A: That's not a question I can answer. That's something that your paper and others are going to be researching and finding a lot more of an accurate answer to than I can give. I have no regrets about our campaign. Our goal was to have the biggest turnout for a Democrat in our history, and we did that. Tim (Johnson) won with 164,000 votes just two years before. We were optimistically thinking that we could turn out 190,000 votes, and we exceeded it by 3,000. We never dreamed it was possible to turn out 193,000 votes, but we did.

Q: Are you an obstructionist?

A: I feel that our country has benefited for 200 years from good public debate, and to differ with any president as a congressional leader is part of the democratic process. I differed with President Clinton on things, and I've differed with Republican and Democratic presidents. But that's part

of the debate.

I took issue with some of the positions and some of the agenda of this president, and I felt I always needed to be honest with myself and with regard to what my role is as a leader of the Democratic caucus. I strongly believe it was in the interest of the people of South Dakota that these issues be raised and that my voice be heard, especially on economic issues where we differed so substantially. My feeling was that the vast majority of South Dakotans were not going to benefit from the economic policies of this administration.

Q: Are modern Democrats too liberal for South Dakotans? Do South Dakota Democrats need to be more conservative to win?

A: Not at all. South Dakotans are in many ways very progressive people. I think it would be a big mistake for our party to try to be more like conservatives. ... We are the party of progressive ideas and progressive policy. The Social Security system, the Medicare system, rural electrification, highway programs, public education, equal rights — these are all progressive ideas. I still believe we have an agenda and a role today. We don't need two conservative parties. We need a progressive party and a conservative party, and we need to find as much common ground as we can, to try to resolve the differences among us. The common ground of politics is not on the far left or far right. It's in the middle.

Q: You've been the face of the state Democratic party for a long time now, calling on voters to contribute, to volunteer, to support candidates. Who will take that role now?

A: Clearly, in our party in South Dakota, we have two extraordinary leaders in Tim and (Rep.) Stephanie (Herseth). I have no doubt they will continue to carry our banner very proudly. I have such confidence in and affection for both of them, and I know they will continue to do what needs to be done.

— Jennifer Sanderson

strategy or things we decided along the way, months ago.

"There was no way replaying that would make the outcome any different," he said. "Linda and I and our family made the decision we weren't going to look back. We were going to look forward."

Thune, Daschle said, will get more advice than he knows what to do with. Daschle won't be another cook in the kitchen. But his thoughts on losing a leadership position for his state reveal more about the higher stakes in the Senate, where Thune's experience as a former congressman will be a primer, not a playbook.

"This city is a very competitive one. This institution is a very competitive one. And you may be sworn in as equals, but it stops there," he said. "When you are sworn in, the real challenge is, how can you make the greatest impact for your state? The answer, in my view, is to make your voice heard and to be in the room when the important decisions are made."

'Something great' ahead

Former Democratic Sen. George McGovern doesn't think Daschle's days in those kinds of rooms are over. He knows from experience that the so-

called halls of power don't own the market on a prize so sought-after.

At a recent joint book-signing party in the Jefferson Hotel, a few blocks north of the White House, McGovern honored Daschle as "a great and good man who has served the state well and served the nation well."

McGovern's new book, "The Essential America," is his ninth and, in his opinion, his best. It's about defending the liberal tradition in American politics, a subject on which both men are veterans.

Recalling his own defeat in 1980, McGovern jokingly said he has come to believe that some "strange chemical" appears in South Dakota's water every so often, turning out senators. McGovern isn't "going to shed a tear" over Daschle's defeat. He's learned too much, he said, from his losses in the 1972 presidential and 1980 Senate races.

"After a setback or after a disappointment — after a defeat, if you will," McGovern said, "if you just hang in there, more often than not, something great is going to happen."

Gannett News Service reporters Mike Madden and Chuck Raasch contributed to this article. Reach reporter Jennifer Sanderson at 575-3629.

"I just wanted to compliment you, first of all.
"You've written several pieces during the campaign
that I thought, by far, set you apart as the best writer
of the group and the most accurate and fair.

"There were many fair writers. But you were fair
and I really admired the way you did it."

*Sen. Tom Daschle, 12/10/2004,
on why he requested to speak with me
for his last official interview,
the first since conceding defeat
to Republican John Thune*