Dusty Johnson outlines his vision as governor to SD State Boys attendees

Johnson discussed education, taxes and his campaign for governor during a Q&A with Boys State students in Aberdeen

By **Jason Lopez Martinez** - May 27, 2026 in **Politics**, **Featured**, **News** Reading Time: 3 minutes

With South Dakota's Republican primary election less than a week away, U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson. R-S.D., spent the evening of Monday, May 25 at Northern State University pitching his plan for the state's future.

Johnson spoke to South Dakota American Legion Boys State students at the Johnson Fine Arts Center at Northern State University, where he talked about his career, his time at Boys State and his campaign for governor before answering a variety of questions.

"I feel really, really good about having run the race," Johnson said. "I have no regret about giving up a nearly sure thing in D.C. to come back to fight a far more difficult race in South Dakota, because I view it as a fight for the future of South Dakota."

Johnson told students that his campaign is focused on public safety, education and creating better jobs in the state. He said South Dakota needs "bold vision" to improve education outcomes and keep young people in the state.



U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson. R-S.D., greets South Dakota Boys State Student during a photo session after a question and answer session Monday, May 25, at the Johnson Fine Arts Center in Aberdeen. Johnson answered questions on education, workforce development, and his political campaign for SD governor. Photo by Jason Lopez Martinez.



When asked about brain drain – the idea of South Dakota workers leaving the state for work – Johnson pushed back slightly on the idea that South Dakota is only losing talent, saying it's up to the people.

"We lose a lot of good people, we also get a lot of good people from other states," Johnson said. "Let's make sure that you can go kind of anywhere you want if you choose to be here."

Johnson said strong schools, safe streets and a strong economy would help make South Dakota a place people choose to stay.

As for artificial intelligence and data centers, Johnson said he supports data centers only if projects include what he called the "right" protections and economic benefits for communities.

Johnson said properly regulated data centers could help lower property taxes and support schools through additional tax revenue while avoiding strain on local infrastructure.

"We're not going to welcome data centers to South Dakota unless they can prove that they're going to do it the right way," Johnson said.

After speaking with students, Johnson met with reporters and said he feels momentum is building in the final stretch before the June 2 primary.

"I couldn't feel better," Johnson said. "The momentum really seems to be building."

Johnson also criticized recent sales tax increases, saying South Dakota should not raise multiple taxes at once when affordability remains a concern for residents.

Those tax increases include:

- A 0.3% increase in state sales tax when the tax automatically returns to 4.5%, the increased revenue will be used for property tax relief.
- An optional 0.5% sales tax for counties. If counties choose to put it in place, revenue is to be used for property tax relief.
- An optional, temporary 1% sales tax for cities to be used for voter-approved capital improvements.

Johnson said taken together, all three account for "the biggest increase in state history" and said he would not have signed all three increases into law at the same time.

Johnson also responded to criticism about outside political groups running ads in the governor's race, saying his campaign does not control super PACs or outside groups.

"This is a free country," Johnson said. "They get to be upset if they want to be."

Throughout the evening, Johnson repeatedly told students that leadership requires work ethic, persistence and a willingness to take difficult positions. When one student asked what he learned from campaigning, Johnson said "nothing beats work ethic."

"You can't just use vibes or political talking points to govern a state," Johnson said. "You've got to have a plan."