

2020 STATE OF THE JUDICIARY

DAVID GILBERTSON

CHIEF JUSTICE

Governor Noem, Lieutenant Governor Rhoden, Speaker Haugaard, members of the Legislature, Constitutional Officers, my fellow Justices, Judges, Unified Judicial System (UJS) employees and all citizens of the State of South Dakota:

INTRODUCTION

This is the 19th year I have been privileged as your Chief Justice to deliver the State of the Judiciary message. There are several reasons that I do so.

It allows this Legislature, the bar, and the taxpaying public to know what is going on in the Unified Judicial System from the person who is ultimately responsible for its overall operation--the Chief Justice. As President Harry Truman observed, "the buck stops here."

This is also an opportunity for me to identify problems facing the state's legal system and propose how to address them. If you look back over the last 19 years, that is the consistent theme of my messages. They are not sugar-coated. You get the bad news along with the good news. Some are clearly not pleasant bedtime stories.

Many programs that have been instituted during the past two decades deal with people experiencing problems. Governor William Janklow was fond of saying that government should do for people only what they cannot do for themselves. Many of our programs focus on those groups--victims of crime, the abused elderly and children, the mentally ill, those addicted to drugs and alcohol, and those denied reasonable access to rural legal services.

I have spent much time talking about UJS problem-solving courts and alternative sentencing programs--Drug Courts, DUI Courts, Veterans Treatment Courts, Mental Health Courts, and the HOPE Program. We all agree that people who commit crimes should be held accountable and the public safety protected. However, we also need to be realistic enough to deal with the underlying cause of what got them into the criminal justice system in the first place. This requires more common sense than profound knowledge. To ignore the underlying cause is simply to guarantee that those people will return again and again to the criminal justice system--a revolving door until they either die or are cured. Under these circumstances cures are not all that frequent.

Our alternative sentencing programs are not a “get out of jail free” card. They are not meant for people who commit violent felonies, predatory sex offenders, or those who make a conscious choice to be career criminals. We have prisons for those folks. On the day I became a judge in 1986, a wise, seasoned judge advised me that the purpose of the court system is not to fill the jails, but to keep the peace. Our evolving alternative programs are an attempt to fulfill his observation. Eleven years ago our alternative programs were non-existent. We now have 19 programs that cover a significant portion of South Dakota. 516 South Dakotans have successfully graduated from these programs.

The condition of the judicial services offered to the citizens of South Dakota and those who use our court system is excellent. Recently a Harris poll was taken on the status of the court systems in all fifty states. Those polled actually use the courts in this state and other states. I was delighted to learn that out of the fifty states, South Dakota placed at the very top. We were number one overall. That rating was based on ten criteria. South Dakota circuit judges were rated fifth for impartiality, third for competence, and our appellate review came in second. Our juries’ fairness and determination of damages came in at number one. Our overall ranking was first in the nation. However, there are storm clouds on the horizon I will address later in this message.

Those of you who serve or have served in the Legislature may wonder from time to time if the bills you pass and become law ultimately do any good. A major portion of my message to you today details how these laws have succeeded in improving the lives of South Dakotans.

SENATE BILL 70

In the past year there has been significant public and legislative discussion about Senate Bill 70. A major portion of the discussion concerned the merits of presumptive probation as well as the fiscal impact of alternatives to it.

When it passed in 2013, SB 70 overhauled the state’s adult criminal justice system. At that point the then-existing prison system was overloaded with non-violent offenders. The state had two options: build and staff additional women’s and men’s prisons, or try the route adopted by the Legislature that became Senate Bill 70.

The drafters of SB 70 realized that its policy changes would need to be reviewed as the times and events changed. Clearly, no one at that point could foresee the explosion of drugs, especially meth and opioids. Realizing that the law should not remain static, SB 70 provided for an Oversight Council made up of the various participants in the criminal justice system. It provided a vehicle to review a portion of, or all of, the SB 70 statutes. It also provided a vehicle to review the costs of alternatives to the present system. The Council sunsetted after five years.

That does not mean, however, that it is not important to continue to reexamine the policy changes SB 70 implemented and the interplay of its provisions to address public safety, produce better outcomes for those involved in the criminal justice system, and wisely spend the taxpayer dollars that support the criminal justice system. The UJS stands ready to continue this examination.

SENATE BILL 73

Last year there was also significant discussion about Senate Bill 73 which overhauled the then-existing juvenile system. Under the system that existed prior to its enactment in 2015, South Dakota led all 50 states in the percentage of juveniles who were incarcerated. Obviously, that was not something to be proud of. Moreover, placements were costing the state a great amount of money and were rising.

As with SB 70, SB 73 provided for an Oversight Counsel. It still functions and can review a portion of, or all of, the laws on juvenile delinquency and report its findings to this Legislature. It can also provide estimates of costs for alternatives and compare them to the costs of the current system.

As options are studied, one thing is clear. We cannot return to the brick and mortar institutions that the State possessed and operated in the 1950's and 1960's. They no longer exist.

At its core, the goal of SB 73 is to provide protection for the public and corrective action for the juvenile and his or her family. As my friend, Clarence, once said, "All kids are good kids at heart; the trick is to keep them alive."

DRUG AND DUI COURTS

A few years ago, I informed you that a new wave of evil had descended upon our citizens. That evil was the increased addiction to drug usage. That evil continues to stalk our land and decimate and devour all too many of our citizens. South Dakota's Drug Courts and DUI Courts assist us in ridding our population of the curse of drug and alcohol addiction. We aggressively promote these successful alternatives to continued addiction. These programs save lives that would otherwise be lost. They also provide substantial savings to the taxpayer. A year in the penitentiary costs around \$22,000. A year in a Drug Court or DUI Court costs a fraction of that or \$8,015 per year. That cost has remained constant over the previous years. While it is a bargain, it is not free. To maintain the high-quality counseling and treatment services that are imperative to successful treatment, I am requesting an additional \$650,000. It will allow the statewide network of Drug Courts and DUI Courts to continue to work successfully because of the well-trained and dedicated people who comprise the treatment teams for each court. Sending someone with an addiction to a penitentiary or jail that provides no treatment is

like sending someone there with cancer and expecting them to be released cancer-free. Addiction hijacks their brain as well as their body.

Of particular concern to me is the literal explosion of the number of females convicted of drug offenses. When I was a circuit judge in the late 1980's, there were only 32 beds in the women's prison. It was never full. Today it has unfortunately passed the 500-bed mark.

Of the 557 women in the South Dakota Correctional System at the end of 2018, only 13 percent of them were in prison for violent crimes. 482 women were convicted of non-violent crimes and three-fourths of them, or 352, were convicted of drug-related offenses.

The curse of drug addiction has negative family results. National studies show that up to 80 percent of children who have a parent in prison will someday also end up in prison. The revolving prison door carries with it generational consequences.

Drug addicts are so concerned about feeding their addiction that they ignore the emotional and physical needs of the children in the household. Medical researchers tell us that when a child is born, a vast majority of what that child learns occurs in the first three years of life. Brain scans of children evidence the children's mental development during this time period. For children of drug addicts there is no development because they are ignored. A brain scan of a three-year-old child of drug addicted parents compares with an aged victim in the advanced stages of Alzheimer's Disease. Both scans are basically empty. For the children, this damage is irreversible and cannot be made up through medical or remedial means. They are cursed with going through life robbed of the chance of leading a normal one. They and society are the ultimate victims.

When the Drug Court pilot program began in the Northern Black Hills in 2008, we never dreamed that the evolution of society would present such monumental problems. The drug problem in those days was considered "manageable." Now it is everywhere, and despite our best efforts we once again are playing "catch-up." For example, the number of adults arrested for drug crimes in South Dakota climbed from 2778 in 2008, to 9080 in 2018. That is an increase of 227% in ten years.

In 2018, we served 594 participants in Drug Courts, DUI Courts, and Veterans Courts which was up from the 519 participants the year before. 135 participants have graduated from these programs. What is their future upon graduation? Of those who have been out of the programs for three years or more, 82 percent of graduates do not reoffend. Only 18 percent do reoffend. That is a substantially higher success rate than the 43 percent success rate for people paroled from the penitentiary.

Currently our programs are limited by the dosage and type of treatment services available on an outpatient basis. When inpatient treatment services are warranted, they are difficult to access for the participant due to the long waiting periods for inpatient treatment. The Drug Court has no such inpatient option. It cannot accept those unfortunate folks. Housing for drug offenders is limited or entirely unavailable.

This creates a situation where it is impossible for the participant to be successful while trying to balance paying rent with attending numerous hours of required treatment services. We cannot expect those with addictions to work full time and move successfully through the Drug Court program if they live under a bridge or in a cardboard box. The reality is that they go to the penitentiary or the funeral home because we cannot take them into our programs.

I think it is time to develop a concept that will incorporate a residential housing component into our program. It makes little sense to treat the addicted who have a home and, like the priest and Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan, pass by on the other side of the road and ignore the person laying in the ditch. Former Chief Justice Warren Burger noted, "Concepts of justice must have hands and feet."

MENTAL HEALTH AND THE COURTS

In 2017 this Legislature passed broad-based legislation to speed up and improve the treatment of criminal defendants who cannot proceed in the criminal justice system because they need to be evaluated by mental health professionals to determine if they are competent to assist their defense attorneys and enter a plea to their criminal charges. This legislation reduced the wait time for competency evaluations from the 4-6 month range to an average of just 37 days, expanded the definition of those authorized to do competency evaluations, and increased the number of available competency evaluators in South Dakota from 6 to 31. It goes a long way to ensure statewide coverage. No longer do all roads lead to Yankton and the Human Services Center located there.

For the first time, stakeholders across the criminal justice spectrum have completed a significant amount of mental health training. Over 1000 state prison officers, 400 jail officers, 104 states attorneys and deputies, 45 judges, 100 court services officers, 240 public defenders, and 129 new law enforcement officers have benefited from this training. This training did not exist in South Dakota prior to the 2017 legislation.

MENTAL HEALTH COURTS

When I addressed you last year, the Mental Health Court in Rapid City had just become fully operational after a six-month period of selecting and training its

staff. Now, with a year of operation, it is doing well. The program has grown in its first year. It now serves 13 clients. It promises to provide significant mental health services to defendants whose underlying reason for becoming enmeshed in the criminal justice system is mental illness. To treat them instead of incarcerating them for lengthy periods of time is more effective, reduces costs, and reduces the likelihood of repeat trips into the criminal justice system.

Last year this Legislature also funded the creation of a Mental Health Court in the Minnehaha County area. The need for this Mental Health Court was great. In just five months in 2018, 515 or 13.5 percent of the prisoners screened at intake in the Minnehaha County Jail indicated they may suffer from a mental illness. When the appropriate six-month training period is completed, this Mental Health Court will follow in the footsteps of the successful Rapid City program and become operational on January 1, 2020.

MENTAL TELE-HEALTH PROPOSAL

The UJS is exploring the concept of incorporating mental tele-health services within the judicial system. We have discussed establishing mental tele-health services with law enforcement entities that are not large enough to have direct local access to these services.

When I discussed this idea with Walter Panzirer, the trustee of the Helmsley Charitable Trust, we thought it would be worthwhile to see if this concept could be expanded to provide mental tele-health services to others in the criminal justice system. Governor Noem has agreed to also participate in the study of this proposal. It could help criminal defense attorneys dealing with clients. It could assist judges in providing better judicial proceedings and sentencing. It could provide Court Services Officers with tools to better supervise and rehabilitate probationers with mental health issues. It could, in limited cases, also assist prosecutors. This is extremely important to everybody as more people are placed on probation than sent to the penitentiaries.

VETERANS TREATMENT COURTS

The Veterans Treatment Court concept continues to expand and grow. We now have active Veterans Treatment Courts in Minnehaha County, Pennington County, and Codington County. All programs are under the supervision of a judge who is a veteran and can relate to the problems veterans face.

We have been assisted by the services of the Veterans Administration. This has allowed us access to inpatient VA treatment where appropriate. The Veterans Treatment Courts stand alone among all our problem-solving court programs to offer inpatient services.

At the end of the horrific Civil War, President Lincoln commented, “Thank God I have lived to see this day. It seems to me that I have been dreaming a horrid dream for four years and now the nightmare is gone.” We hope veterans who complete our program will be able to put their demons behind them and say the same.

HOPE PROGRAM

Drugs are an increasing problem in the rural areas as well as the urban areas of this state. Unfortunately, in the rural areas, the mental health and addiction services we use in our Drug Courts and DUI Courts are not available. Instead, we have instituted the HOPE Program.

This is a specialized form of intensive probation. As a condition of this probation, participants follow the requirements of HOPE probation under the supervision of a specially-trained court services officer. The program focuses on drug offenders with a high risk to reoffend. Random, frequent drug testing is a key component of HOPE. There are swift, certain, and proportional sanctions with a weekend of jail for noncompliance with probation conditions, or for failing a drug test.

HOPE was started in 2014 and is active in 14 counties. As of July 1, 2019, 373 individuals have participated in the program. 106 people currently participate in the program. 138 people have successfully completed this program. “But for” this fine program, many of these participants would be in the penitentiary or would have reoffended resulting in a penitentiary sentence. Presiding Judge Scott Myren, the creative force behind this program, estimates 80 percent of the people who complete the HOPE program would have failed conventional probation because of continued drug use.

24/7 PROGRAM

In 2007 this Legislature authorized the state-wide implementation of the 24/7 Program. As a condition of bond, those who are facing certain alcohol related traffic offenses are required to: (1) abstain from consumption of alcohol; (2) stay out of businesses that sell or serve alcohol; and (3) report to the local sheriff’s office twice every day and submit to a breath test. Failing the test results in immediate incarceration for 24 hours. Failing to appear for the test results in the immediate issuance of an arrest warrant.

Throughout the history of the program over 35,000 South Dakotans have been tested. The failure rate is only an astonishing one percent. The other 99% are in compliance with the abstinence requirement.

The 24/7 Program has produced at least two positive long-term results. Felony DUI convictions have dropped from 1348 in 2007 to 551 in 2019--a reduction of 59.1%. Alcohol related fatalities have also declined. From 2000 through 2004 an average of 83 lives were lost annually to traffic related fatalities. From 2014 through 2018 the number of deaths dropped to 51, a reduction of 38.8%. The 24/7 Program played a significant factor in the decline. The 24/7 Program has been so successful that it has been copied by other states and studied by other countries

ELDER ABUSE

A few years ago, at my request, this Legislature passed a comprehensive program to protect our senior citizens from physical abuse, mental abuse, and financial abuse. These statutes are providing their intended results. Moreover, a Special Assistant Attorney General and a full-time investigator provide aggressive enforcement and protection for vulnerable seniors. Statewide enforcement under the supervision of the Attorney General provides state-wide protection. Despite the old saying that you cannot legislate morality, you can, and did, legislate protection for South Dakota's senior citizens.

RURAL ATTORNEY PROGRAM

Every state in the country lacks attorneys in rural areas. The South Dakota Rural Attorney Program continues to be the gold standard for all 50 states. The Rural Attorney Program expands the ability of our rural citizens to access legal services in their home counties and towns. We currently have contracts with 25 rural counties in South Dakota to assist them in placing an attorney in their county. These results are impressive considering five years ago the program did not exist. Last year the very first group of five attorneys accepted into the program successfully completed their five-year contractual commitment with the program. Four of the five have chosen to remain in their locale thus achieving long term successful results for local access to legal services in those areas.

Two years ago, the law expanded to benefit municipalities with a population of 3500 or less. The City of Elk Point in partnership with Union County became our first municipal contract. The City of Sisseton and Roberts County became the second partnership.

In 2019, this Legislature made the program permanent. Now, when an attorney completes the five-year contractual obligation, that open slot is replaced by another lawyer placed in another county or town. This ensures the program will continue to provide attorneys where needed instead of ending when it reached its 32 originally allocated slots.

All trends continue to be positive. Chief among them is that not one attorney who has gone into the program later left rural practice due to lack of available legal work. The need is there and the need is being met.

We are obtaining quality participants to go into the South Dakota Rural Attorney Program. The county, the municipality, the attorney and the public are the beneficiaries. This is taxpayer money that is well-invested. It will pay long-term benefits for the participant counties, municipalities, and the state as a whole. It helps the infrastructure of these rural counties expand and grow, rather than wither away and become uninhabited with only remnants of courthouses and what was once a thriving rural society.

DISASTER PREPARATION AND RESPONSE

Several years ago, when the threat of a pandemic was looming, I sought and obtained from this Legislature the legal authority to react promptly to natural or man-made disasters that interfere with the administration of South Dakota's judicial system. We came very close to invoking these provisions during the 2011 floods along the Missouri River, but in the end the courthouses that were threatened were able to remain open.

Unfortunately, the City of Burke was devastated by a tornado last August. It demolished portions of the school that were only two hundred feet away from the Gregory County Courthouse. The courthouse sustained damage to its windows and we were unsure when electrical power could be restored and whether our IT systems would continue to function. Faced with these uncertainties, the Supreme Court invoked its emergency judicial power at the urging of the Presiding Judge. We temporarily moved the court operations for Gregory County to Tripp County to provide continued access to the public. We were fortunate in that it turned out that the damage sustained by the Gregory County Courthouse was not as extensive as it could have been. In a matter of days I personally inspected the courthouse, conferred with the Gregory County Commission and the Presiding Judge, and obtained Supreme Court authorization to reopen court services in the Gregory County Courthouse. As for this experience, one newspaper reporter quipped, "out of a whirlwind, the Lord answered Job's plea for justice say the scriptures."

It was a valuable experience for the Supreme Court. We experienced how to implement emergency judicial power. Future events may present us with a more serious and long-term challenge.

JUDICIAL SELECTION AND RETENTION

Over the past decade there has been a steady decline in the number of applicants for vacant circuit judge positions. In a perfect world, the Governor, who fills most vacancies, would have an impressive number of highly qualified

candidates to choose from. In election years, a similar group of highly qualified candidates would be available for voters to consider.

Why is this important? In 1993 the South Dakota Supreme Court, in *Cummings v. Mickelson*, observed, “The power which the people of this state have entrusted to a circuit court judge affects the people’s lives, welfare and property to no small extent.” Circuit judges exercise this substantial power for extended periods of time--sometimes well over 25 years.

In recent years, judicial salaries in South Dakota have fallen significantly behind comparable income of South Dakota attorneys in private practice and have also fallen significantly behind judicial salaries in all neighboring states. Thus, it is not surprising that the number of applications filed with the Judicial Qualifications Commission for judicial vacancies has fallen substantially. Would you want you or your family’s life, property, or liberty in the hands of someone who barely made it through law school, finally passed the bar exam after failing it three times, and has not kept abreast with the many changes in the law? That sorry situation cannot be allowed to exist now, nor should it in the future. We need to retain judicial excellence that has resulted in the Harris Poll ranking South Dakota with the best state legal system in the nation.

COURT SERVICES

Court Services, commonly known as probation, is a form of judicial supervision for adult convicted felons who are not sentenced to penal institutions. It quietly functions in an efficient manner. There are more people on felony adult probation in South Dakota than in penitentiaries, county jails, and drug and alcohol programs combined.

Not everyone qualifies for probation, nor should they. Dangerous felons, career criminals, predatory sex offenders and the like, belong in a penitentiary. Those seriously addicted to drugs and alcohol who have committed crimes other than those just referenced belong in our Drug Court and DUI Court or other treatment programs.

In 2017, this Legislature adopted a comprehensive program to deal with the mental health of those who come into the criminal justice system. There have been many benefits. Court Services has adopted a standard intake screening to determine if symptoms of mental issues are present when a person comes into the system. Last year, 1921 probationer mental health screens were completed on people placed on probation. One quarter of those screened indicated a referral should be made for a mental health assessment. A gender breakdown shows that 23 percent of males and 32 percent of females needed a referral. Mental health screens will enhance the quality of Court Services supervision, increase the likelihood of successful probation, and reduce the likelihood of repeat offenses.

Improvement of our Court Services program is a plus not only because of the number of people we deal with, but also the cost factor. Probation costs the taxpayer about three dollars per day. The alternatives, including incarceration, cost ten times or more than that number. A quality Court Services program benefits everyone in the long run.

In the face of substantial increases in the number of people placed on felony probation in recent years, the number of court services officers tasked with their supervision has remained basically stagnant. As I have told you before, the rubber band can only stretch so far before it breaks. We are at that point. Thus, I am seeking seven additional court services officers to deal with this situation--three would be stationed in the Sioux Falls area, three in the Rapid City area, and one in the Watertown area. If the funding permits, it would take 20 additional court services officers to fully address this dire shortage.

THE SOUTH DAKOTA BAR EXAMINATION

Traditionally the passage rate of the South Dakota Bar Exam for first-time takers who graduated from the University of South Dakota School of Law was expected to be in the 80 to 90% range. Those takers from out-of-state were also more likely to pass than not.

Several years ago, that passage rate radically declined for both in-state and out-of-state test takers. This decline was not unique to South Dakota. It was a nationwide problem. Much has been written about the causes of the decline and there has been more than a little finger pointing. No single cause has been identified. It was likely a combination of a number of factors.

The University of South Dakota School of Law made improvements in teaching and preparation for this crucial test. Members of the Bar and public also contributed significantly to fund scholarships to encourage the best students to stay in South Dakota for their legal education. The Supreme Court made modest modifications in the testing procedures and scores required for passage.

One thing did not change. The South Dakota Board of Bar Examiners remained stable in its membership. Several board members remained from the previous "glory days" of the 90% passage rates. Through the ups and downs the South Dakota Bar Examiners continue to function as gatekeepers by recommending to the Supreme Court that only those who pass the rigorous exam, and possess good moral character, be allowed to exercise the power granted to attorneys.

As I told you last year, the improvement in the bar exam results for the USD School of Law graduates who were first-time test takers was nothing short of stunning. In July of 2016 that passage figure had fallen to a dismal 59% passage rate. It fell even further in July of 2017 to 52%. However, in July of 2018 it

rebounded to a success rate of 82%--a 30% improvement over 2017. The July 2019 pass rate was 81% which will hopefully establish a long-term positive trend rather than a one-year aberration.

TESTING INDIAN LAW ON THE BAR EXAMINATION

Early in my tenure as Chief Justice, it became clear to me that a significant number of South Dakota attorneys were not proficient in the complex area of Indian Law that combines federal law, tribal law, and state law. Therefore in 2007, the South Dakota Supreme Court passed a rule that required testing on Indian Law as part of the South Dakota bar exam. My theory was that an attorney who learned Indian Law and passed the bar exam would retain knowledge of Indian Law when practicing law and benefit clients seeking professional legal assistance. Since its enactment, the administration of this portion of the bar exam, as well as the entire exam, has been expertly overseen by our Board of Bar Examiners.

Many states have opted to go to a national standardized bar exam. Were South Dakota to join this movement, we would no longer be able to include Indian Law on the bar exam. That happened in the two other states that previously tested Indian Law on their bar exam. It is the South Dakota Supreme Court's highest priority to retain the Indian Law question, and let other states enter into standardized testing if they so choose. While South Dakota remains the lone state to test on this subject, knowledge of Indian Law is essential for lawyers who practice in South Dakota. It recognizes a significant portion of our citizens and their tribal governments. Cooperation between the tribes and the state must be more than mere words. It must also be deeds. As Benjamin Franklin observed, "Well done is better than well said." This important program has achieved its intended results. It is an unqualified success.

PUBLIC ACCESS

Prior to September 2001, if you wanted to hear a South Dakota Supreme Court oral argument you had one option--drive to Pierre no matter what the weather and attend in person, and hope you were one of the lucky 27 people who had access to the limited public seating in the courtroom. If you wanted a copy of a Supreme Court opinion you could purchase it for a fee from a law book company and wait eight weeks for publication.

In September 2001, television and still cameras were allowed into the Supreme Court oral arguments for the first time since statehood. Not long after that, the Court installed Internet access to live oral arguments on the Supreme Court's website. This was a blizzard-proof improvement. It also improved press coverage. Any member of the press can sit in his or her pressroom and listen to the

arguments unfold rather than trying to convince an editor that the drive to Pierre is worth the time and expense. Moreover, all oral arguments back to 2001 are archived on the Supreme Court's website and current oral arguments are posted within 24 hours of the argument. If you learn of a decision that interests you, you can listen to the oral argument to expand your understanding of the decision. The Court's written opinions are also posted on the Court's website on the day they are issued. Thus, the press and public have instant access to Supreme Court decisions.

At the circuit court level, limited access to trials and other proceedings is available. Both audio and video coverage are authorized when the attorneys and the judge consent. The judge, in his or her own discretion, may also allow audio coverage.

In 2004 the UJS established an interface television system. It allows for transmission on a two-way closed television system between every courthouse in South Dakota. It is used for bond hearings, pre-trial hearings, witness participation in trials, depositions, and meetings of UJS personnel.

The UJS is currently engaged in a pilot project to improve access to our court records. This is possible because we adopted an electronic documents system known as Odyssey several years ago. Beginning July 1, 2019, attorneys who are not officially involved with a case may review any case file statewide electronically. Ultimately, we hope to provide the same access to the public. However, this presents implementation problems. People's private information must be protected and redacted. For example, several decades ago, divorce filings were indexed under the Social Security number of the husband or wife. Before those files can be made open for public inspection, information such as Social Security numbers, banking accounts and tax ID numbers, must be redacted. Public access to our court records should not inadvertently assist identity theft.

The Supreme Court and circuit courts exist to resolve the public's legal disputes. The Supreme Court has made major strides in allowing the public to learn how courts resolve those disputes. The current system works so well that it may come as a surprise to some that it was not always that way.

JUSTICE PATRICIA DeVANEY

Last April, Governor Noem appointed Circuit Judge Patricia DeVaney to fill the vacancy on the South Dakota Supreme Court caused by the unexpected death of Justice Steven Zinter. Justice DeVaney's experience and temperament render her superbly qualified to be the 52nd Justice of the Supreme Court.

Justice DeVaney served in the office of the South Dakota Attorney General from 1993 to 2012. There she obtained broad-based experience in trial litigation

and appellate work. Her work brought her into contact with major civil and criminal litigation.

Since 2012 she has served as a circuit judge in the Sixth Judicial Circuit handling major civil and criminal cases. This career path provides Justice DeVaney with an extensive background in all areas of the law, the courts, and appellate procedure. She is an exceptional addition to the Supreme Court.

THE FUTURE

What is the future of South Dakota's judicial system? It is difficult to plan for the future if you do not learn from the past. The philosopher Santayana observed that those who ignore the lessons of history are doomed to repeat them. Looking toward the future, I agree with the classic statement that the only thing necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing.

Even with a thorough knowledge of the past, planning for the future is not easy. I recently reviewed my initial 2002 State of the Judiciary Message to this Legislature. I noticed that not one of the topics I talk about today was discussed in that message. It clearly was another time.

The youth of our state are its future. Today we see helpless children who are the victims of abuse and neglect. These numbers are sadly increasing. Likewise, all too many of our youth are being crippled by addiction to various kinds of illegal drugs. Although we are a state of many cultures, a common thread of our heritage is the long-standing recognition of caring for the needs of our children and youth. The biblical admonition that little children are to be protected rather than treated as a piece of family property to use or abuse is a hallmark of our country's Judeo-Christian heritage that arrived on our shores with the Pilgrims and continues to this day. Similar traditions of concern and care for children and our youth come from our state's Native American culture. It has received continual legal recognition from our earliest statutes and has evolved with time. While we have been characterized as a "throw-away society," it can in no way include indifference to the plight of children and youth in need.

The face of the South Dakota judiciary has also evolved. In my opinion the biggest change that has taken place in the state courts of South Dakota is that they have shifted their focus from being reactive institutions to becoming proactive in many respects.

Early on in my service as your Chief Justice I commented to you that the South Dakota judiciary should mirror the citizens it serves. At that point the South Dakota judicial system was overwhelmingly male. Only six women were on the circuit bench and none on the South Dakota Supreme Court. Today we have eighteen female circuit judges out of a total of 44 and two of the five Supreme Court

Justices are female. Today appointment of women to the bench is considered part of the norm and not an exceptional event.

As far as the future, there is a solid distinction between gazing wistfully into a crystal ball and planning for the future. This differentiation requires no profound knowledge. Throughout my lifetime, I have tried to follow the motto of the Boy Scouts, "Be Prepared." While planning for the future is essential, you have to maintain enough flexibility so that when the unexpected comes, and it will come, you are able to adjust to meet it and not be overwhelmed by it.

If you follow the quip of Benjamin Franklin that the only two things in the future that are certain are death and taxes, that does leave a lot of area for the unexpected. The best we can do is to prepare to the optimum of our abilities. In so doing we are guided by the Constitution, statutes, and the goal of maintaining a peaceful resolution of the citizens' disputes. The people within the judicial system come and go, but the fundamental basics remain the same. We do not want to become a legal dinosaur lumbering off into oblivion.

COURT IS ADJOURNED

As I mentioned, this is my 19th State of the Judiciary Message. It is also my final message since mandatory retirement looms. As such, a few personal parting comments may be appropriate. My father was a minister and my mother was an Army combat surgical nurse during World War II. On the day I became a Supreme Court Justice in 1995 one wit observed, "The Gilbertsons will save you one way or another--whether you want it or not."

During my tenure on the Supreme Court, the beard has gone from black to white and I have grown from a young man to an older, but hopefully wiser, man. During the past 34 years it has been my highest honor and privilege to serve the citizens of South Dakota as a Circuit Judge, a Supreme Court Justice, and Chief Justice. I could not have served in these positions without the constant support and love of my wife, Deborah, and my family.

I shall always be most grateful to Governor William Janklow. In 1986 he believed that a 35-year-old attorney from Sisseton had the potential to become a circuit judge. Ten years later he once again took a chance on me by appointing me to the South Dakota Supreme Court. It is my regret that he is not alive today so I could say "thank you" as I approach the end of my judicial career.

During my time on the Supreme Court, I have advocated for many new programs that have come into being within the Unified Judicial System. For the most part, these programs have succeeded with their designated goals. In some instances, it took a certain amount of time to achieve success. This success is due to

the dedication of the people who worked on them. Without their impressive work ethic, these programs would have graced the scrap heap.

As it is, many needy South Dakotans benefit from these programs. I trust they will continue to do so well into the future. We must, however, avoid the temptation to “settle in” when we make progress. The fundamental problems they were designed to address are issues that will be with us for the foreseeable future. As times change, our response must change with them.

I have been privileged to work with some of the finest people I have ever met—my fellow Justices, both present and past. To a person, each brought wisdom and dedication to their position. During my 25 years on the Supreme Court I have never seen a Justice decide a case based on popularity, fear, or partisan political considerations, or conform a case to some pundit’s definition of a “conservative” view or a “liberal” view. They simply analyzed each case based on its facts and their understanding of the law.

I have also had the good fortune to work with an outstanding group of employees of the Unified Judicial System. They are the folks that make the system work successfully. The epitaph that Andrew Carnegie wrote for himself comes to mind. On his tomb it states, “Here lies a man who knew how to enlist in his service better [people] than himself.”

I would be remiss if I did not express my gratitude for the splendid cooperation I received from Governor Janklow, Governor Rounds, Governor Dugaard, and Governor Noem. I also express to this Legislature, and all of your colleagues who came before you these past 19 years, my sincere appreciation for the consideration of my requests to improve the judicial system. Without your approval of these programs, the funding to make them work, and your support, none of this could have been accomplished. For that you should have a great sense of pride.

I am by nature an optimist. Were I not, I would have never run for the position of Chief Justice in the first place. During the very tense times of the JAIL for Judges campaign against the South Dakota judicial system in 2006, a JAIL leader declared me to be the “scum who rose to the top.” My wife was outraged. I told her it probably was better than being known as the scum who did not rise to the top.

While I may have been slow to learn, hopefully I have been slower to forget. I leave knowing the South Dakota Supreme Court and the Unified Judicial System are in good hands. Some may even see this transition as an upgrade. How well I did in my capacity is not for me to say. That determination I leave to others.

While I am not prone to live in the past or dwell on it, I try to learn from it. I leave with satisfaction knowing that there are people alive today who would not

otherwise be without our Drug, DUI, Veterans, and Mental Health courts. Our goal was to swell the employment rolls, not the cemeteries.

Time marches on. Borrowing a theme from St. Paul, in a secular vein, I have tried to fight the good fight, finish the race, and keep the faith. In my time, I have striven to achieve a government of the people, by the people, and for the people where “Under God the People Rule.” As such, my fellow South Dakotans, this year I bid you all a fond farewell.