

Johnson

From Page 1

defect that causes enlarged and tangled blood vessels. He underwent surgery to stop further bleeding.

Johnson then underwent a lengthy regimen of physical, occupational, and speech therapy to gain strength and mobility and restore his severely affected speech.

The brain bleed has slowed his speech and placed limits on his mobility. He used a motorized scooter to get to the podium at Tuesday's news conference.

"I feel great, but I must be honest and I appreciate that my right arm and right leg aren't what they used to be, and my speech is not entirely there," he said. "I think mostly that it's time to go. I feel that I have other things to do besides what I'm doing now."

Whether Johnson was planning to retire has been grist for the political rumor mill for months in South Dakota, and has caused speculation about possible Democratic candidates for his seat in the U.S. Senate. Two names that pop up repeatedly are his son's — U.S. Attorney Brendan Johnson, and former Rep. Stephanie Herseeth Sandlin.

Former Gov. Mike Rounds, a Republican, has already announced his Senate candidacy.

A reporter asked Johnson if he has discussed a possible U.S. Senate bid with his son.

"I think there are several good candidates out there," he said, "and you'll have to ask Brendan about that. It's no great secret that I'm not running again, and I've discussed that with him and a lot of people. But I've not discussed in detail what comes next, whether it's Stephanie or Brendan or whoever."

The senator indicated that he doesn't plan to take a highly active role in the 2014 election.

"I'm busy enough with my Banking Committee duties and the Appropriations Committee, where I'm chairman of ... a subcommittee," he said, "and I'm the number two Democrat on the Energy and the Natural Resources Committee, and I'm number two on the Indian Affairs Committee. That is enough to tide me over."

The senator said he and his wife plan to live in South Dakota full time after he leaves office.

"I want my legacy to be that I worked hard to bring the party together, and factions in South Dakota together. I'm proudest of all that I brought the Indians and cowboys together with Mni Wiconi," Johnson said, responding to a reporter's question. "The cowboys don't get water



Sen. Tim Johnson and his wife, Barb, receive a standing ovation from a standing room only crowd in their hometown of Vermillion Tuesday afternoon. Moments later, Johnson announced that he will not seek another term in the U.S. Senate next year.

PHOTO BY DAVID LIAS

unless the Indians get water, and the Indians don't get water unless the cowboys get water. I take a special point of pride in that."

He admitted that being able to concentrate solely on work and not a campaign will "be strange," eliciting laughter from the audience. "I've planned for elections 36 years in a row, and it's now time to give it up ... I'm certain that I can get over it."

"It's so bittersweet," said Vermillion native Ben Nesselhuf, who serves as chairman of the South Dakota Democratic Party. "Nobody has given more of themselves to the state than Tim and Barb Johnson over the past 26 years, and nobody has earned retirement more than those two."

Nesselhuf said Johnson's political success is legendary in South Dakota.

"I think him winning his first term by 20 points, which is really unheard of in South Dakota in open Congressional seats, really laid the groundwork for his continued success. He also had a fearless tenacity in running against and defeating an incumbent senator, fighting off a challenge from then Rep. John Thune (in 2002), and being a guy who, I

think, was really comfortable with the fact that he was progressive-minded," he said. "He didn't go where the wind was blowing; he fought for what he believed in and he would come and defend it, and was very successful at doing it."

Local politicians attending Tuesday's press conference included District 17 State Sen. Tom Jones, a Democrat from Viborg, and District 18 State Rep. Bernie Hunhoff, a Yankton Democrat.

Hunhoff said he believes Johnson has completed the groundwork that will make it possible for a Democrat to succeed him in the 2014 election.

"The Democrats have had pretty good success on the national level, and I really believe we can be competitive again, in part because Tim Johnson has shown that a progressive can get a lot done in a conservative state," he said. "I don't think our conservative neighbors in South Dakota are adverse to sending a progressive to Washington. We just have to find the right candidate, and they have to have the resources to get their message out."

Nesselhuf believes Johnson's long, successful political career is due, in part, to his ability over the years to ar-

ticulate a message that resonates with South Dakotans.

"I think he probably, more than most people realized, enjoyed a good political scrape where you put your ideas up against someone else's ideas and see who is going to come out on top," he said. "He did it in a way you don't normally see, because he was never after the limelight, and that's such a rarity in politics ... but I think it was one of his greatest strengths."

"I think about how extraordinary it is that a guy has run for office for 36 years as a Democrat in a highly partisan red state," said Scott Heidepriem, a Sioux Falls Democrat whose South Dakota gubernatorial bid in 2010 was unsuccessful. "How do you explain that? To me, that's the question of Tim Johnson, and the only answer is this is a guy who every time he has run for office has under-promised and over-delivered."

"Eventually, voters say, 'We like that. That's like us. We don't make any promises we don't keep.' He never did, and his record of achievement is superb. It's amazing," he said.

Nesselhuf said he had no information that may end speculation about who the

President Obama's Statement On Tim Johnson's Retirement

"For more than three decades, Tim Johnson has dedicated himself to improving the lives of South Dakota's working families. From his early days in the state legislature to his distinguished career in the Senate, Tim has worked tirelessly to protect our environment, empower rural and Native American communities, and build a financial system that is better able to serve the American people. Always a fighter, Tim's return to the Senate floor after a life-threatening brain injury was a powerful moment and his recovery continues to inspire us all. I look forward to working with Senator Johnson as he finishes his third term, and Michelle and I join the people of South Dakota in wishing Tim, Barbara, and their entire family all the best."

Democratic Senate candidate may be.

"I know nothing for certain. There is high interest, very high interest. The names that everyone are talking about are Brendan Johnson and Stephanie Herseeth Sandlin," he said. "I think either one of them will be incredible candidates. I know both of them, and think so highly of both them that whoever ends up being the nominee, I think, will end up being the next senator."

"I believe there will be a really good candidate ready for office, but I also think that today belongs to Tim and to Barb so I'm really not going to speculate a lot about that," Heidepriem said.

Hunhoff said Johnson will always be remembered for his ability to bring people together.

"He brought environmental groups and agricultural groups together, and accomplished great advances in conservation, especially with wetlands and water conservation," he said. "You remember when we used to all fight about wetlands in South Dakota? You don't really hear so much about that anymore because of Tim Johnson. He just really showed that in the delicate balance of progressive thought versus conservatism, even in a red state, the two are very important and you can operate as a progressive and get a lot done."

Hunhoff credits Johnson's moderation, ability to respect those who disagree with him politically, and his patience for his success.

"He's one of the most patient men in South Dakota, I promise you," Hunhoff said.

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