

Group Seeking Changes In Chemical Laws Is Behind Thune Television Ads

BY BOB MERCER

State Capitol Bureau

PIERRE — A group representing chemical manufacturers spent at least \$100,000 on television ads in South Dakota in recent weeks promoting U.S. Sen. John Thune.

The Republican doesn't face re-election until 2016. He didn't have an opponent in 2010. He defeated Senate Democratic leader Tom Daschle in 2004.

Thune and his staff weren't notified in advance the ads would be airing, according to his spokeswoman.

She said no one from the senator's office has asked why the ads are running.

The political purpose of the ads isn't apparent from the content seen by TV viewers.

The back story of the ads, however, is that a major struggle on toxic chemicals is under way in Congress while the chemicals industry is poised for a potentially major U.S. expansion.

The Thune ads are sponsored by the American Chemistry Council. The council supports Senate legislation sought by chemical manufacturers.

The council ran similar ads for a total of eight Senate and House members. The ads come as Senate and House committees consider legislation that would overhaul federal laws on toxic substances.

The council meanwhile issued a study in 2011 that predicted low prices for shale gas would make U.S. sites attractive for chemical processing.

Ethane, a product of shale-gas development and an important component of chemical manufacturing, is less expensive than naphtha used by overseas companies.

The names of 25 Democrats and Republicans so far are on the list of co-sponsors of the Senate legislation, S. 1009. Thune, the No. 3 member of the Senate Republican leadership, isn't among the co-sponsors.

Neither is South Dakota's other senator, Democrat Tim Johnson.

The TV ads in South Dakota are airing just for Thune.

A spokeswoman for the chemistry council answered some questions emailed by a reporter but didn't answer

several inquiries about why Johnson wasn't featured.

Johnson is retiring rather than seeking re-election in 2014.

The ads praise Thune for supporting economic growth and job creation, and urge viewers to call the senator's office to say he's doing a good job.

The council also purchased ads with similar content about Sen. Tom Udall, D-New Mexico; Sen. Chris Coons, D-Delaware; Sen. Kay Hagan, D-North Carolina; and Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky. Udall and Hagan are co-sponsors.

The council also ran ads for three House members, including Rep. Fred Upton, R-Michigan, who is chairman of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce.

The council issued basically identical news releases about all eight.

The House of Representatives has been considering legislation seeking major changes in toxic-chemicals safety laws since 2010. The House bill is very different than the Senate bill, according to a memo recently issued from Democratic staff for the House committee that Republican Upton chairs.

Thune would seem to be considered a ripe target by the council. On various occasions he criticized the Environmental Protection Agency and other federal regulatory agencies under Democratic President Barack Obama's administration.

The Senate bill, known as the Chemical Safety Improvement Act, was introduced by the late Sen. Frank Lautenberg, D-New Jersey, before he died. The main Republican co-sponsor is Sen. David Vitter of Louisiana.

Vitter is the highest-ranked Republican on the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee where the Senate bill is under consideration. Five committee members are co-sponsors, but the panel's chair, Democratic Sen. Barbara Boxer of California, isn't.

Boxer issued a statement on July 31 saying the committee has to change the Senate legislation because it would preempt state regulations and therefore "is not going anywhere" in that version.

"I look forward to addressing this and other problems with S. 1009 so we can vote out a strong bill," Boxer said.

Beyond the Senate committee, the bill has a wide geographic and political cross-section of co-sponsors. They range from Republicans such as Marco Rubio of Florida and Lamar Alexander of Tennessee to Democrats such as Patty Murray of Washington, Charles Schumer of New York and Richard Durbin of Illinois.

Senate co-sponsors from the Great Plains region are Republican John Hoeven of North Dakota and Democrat Tom Harkin of Iowa.

Thune doesn't appear likely to add his name as a co-sponsor. He is waiting to see what happens with the Senate bill, according to a spokeswoman.

"Our office has had no role in the commercial and only found about it as it started to air across South Dakota," Thune's communication director Andi Fouberg said.

"Sen. Thune is aware of the legislation and will take a closer look if the legislation passes out of committee and is considered on the floor," she said.

Fouberg said she was unaware of anyone in Thune's office asking the council why the ad is running. "We have heard from South Dakota ag and biotech groups in support of S. 1009," she said.

A tie behind the scenes between Thune and the American Chemistry Council is David Bockorny of Sioux Falls.

Bockorny is a South Dakota-based lobbyist who heads a national firm and has been a major political supporter of Thune and the senator's Heartland Values political action committee. Both worked for the late U.S. Sen. Jim Abdnor at other points in their careers.

Bockorny and his wife, Jill, have donated tens of thousands of dollars to the Thune political operations in the past decade.

The American Chemistry Council developed into a significant client for the Bockorny Group during the past six years, as Thune became more influential in the Senate.

The firm reported \$100,000 of business revenue so far this year from the council and \$320,000 in each of 2010 through 2012. There also was \$300,000 received in 2009 and \$200,000 in 2008.

As of the time of this writing, Bockorny hadn't responded to a request for comment about the Thune ads.

Judge Refuses To Block New Meat Rules

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — A federal judge has refused to block new rules that require the meat industry to include specific information about the origin of their products on labels. But industry groups say they'll continue fighting.

The new rules took effect in May. They require that labels for steaks, ribs and other cuts of meat include clear information about where animals grown for the meat were born, raised and slaughtered.

A judge refused to issue a preliminary order Wednesday that would've blocked the rules, though he didn't decide the overall lawsuit.

The American Meat Institute said Thursday it plans to appeal. It says the rules are too costly and don't provide any health benefits. The trade group represents meat packers, processors and suppliers.

Seven other industry groups have joined AMI's lawsuit.

Developers To Break Ground In Pierre

PIERRE (AP) — Developers plan to break ground in Pierre this month on an 80-unit apartment complex geared to young professionals.

Michael Crane, one of the developers, tells KCCR radio that the \$7.8 million complex on the northeast part of town will include 50 two-bedroom apartments and 30 one-bedroom apartments.

Crane says the three-story complex will include garages, granite kitchen countertops, vaulted ceilings in the third floor units, a full service fitness center, a theater room, a community room and a guest suite.

First units are expected to be available in July 2014.

Restoration Work Begins On RC Tower

RAPID CITY (AP) — The historic Lookout Tower at Harney Peak in western South Dakota is being restored.

The 7,242-foot-high peak is the highest point in the Black Hills and also billed as the highest point in North America east of the Rocky Mountains. The stone tower that was built there in 1938 by the Civilian Conservation Corps and once used as a fire lookout is now a tourist attraction and in need of repair.

U.S. Forest Service employees and volunteers this week are installing 19 replica windows and three replica doors at the site, the *Rapid City Journal* reported.

"There is only one Harney Peak," said Jackson Poppen, a Forest Service historic preservation specialist. "This is on the National Register (of Historic Places) for a reason; it's architecturally very significant and we need to preserve it."

The work this week is part of a five-year plan for the tower that also includes redoing a lot of the masonry work and rebuilding an observation deck on the highest floor.

S.D. Guardsmen Helping Out On Border

RAPID CITY (AP) — Soldiers with the South Dakota National Guard's Army Aviation Support Facility in Rapid City have departed for the southern U.S. border to help combat drug smuggling, human trafficking and illegal immigration.

The military isn't releasing details of the mission, including its length and the number of soldiers taking part. The Guard cites security concerns.

It is the second time the South Dakota Guard has helped out on the border, but the first time that it's using its own helicopter.

Billionaire To Join Pipeline Foes In Neb.

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — A billionaire investor who has spent more than \$2 million fighting the Keystone XL pipeline is traveling to Nebraska to meet with local opponents of the project.

Asset manager and philanthropist Tom Steyer will help dedicate a barn that opponents are building in the project's expected path.

Opponents are continuing to urge President Barack Obama to deny a federal permit for the pipeline, saying the project doesn't serve U.S. energy interests and would contribute to global warming. Supporters say the pipeline is by far the safest way to transport the oil.

Steyer is scheduled to speak at the dedication on Sept. 22, at 3 p.m. The solar- and wind-powered barn will be located about 15 miles northwest of York.

Man Gets 10 Years For Stomping

RAPID CITY (AP) — A McLaughlin man was sentenced to just over 10 years in federal prison for stomping a man on the head and face with his feet.

The U.S. Attorney's Office says 21-year-old Ross Dean Farrell earlier pleaded guilty to assault with intent to commit murder.

Prosecutors say that last October he was socializing with the victim and others at his home. At some point that evening, the victim went to sleep on a mattress on the floor. Farrell was mad about something the victim or someone else said and pulled the man off the mattress onto the concrete floor and attacked him.

The victim suffered major injuries, including severe head trauma that required surgeries and also had to be placed in a medically induced coma.

Campbell

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the gospel," Campbell told the audience Thursday. "He said that where we are called is to those in the margins, to those who suffer. That is the pro-life stance that I think Jesus calls us to — to make sure all are included, not only in our prayer but also in our active care. In a big society like ours, it is not possible for charity alone to fill up that gap."

At the beginning of her lecture, Campbell called on volunteers to create a human bar graph showing the audience how far the incomes of the top 5 percent of earners outstripped all others between 1979 and 2009. Those on the bottom of the income ladder actually saw their incomes decline.

"For me, it helps explain why it's difficult for folks who are (in the top 5 percent of the income ladder) to understand the struggle (of those at the bottom)," Campbell said. "Because what happens is, not only are they economically removed, but at (the top of the income ladder) they can afford gated communities, private police, private schools, private medical care.

"The distance that is cre-

ated leads to a lack of comprehension, lack of understanding, lack of empathy. It's really worrisome that we're getting so separated from each other. It's an economic challenge that we're facing."

Members of Congress are in those top income levels and don't understand what is going on at the bottom, Campbell said.

"That's why democracy is so important, and that we each use our own voice to speak our truth and be witnesses to each other," she stated.

Campbell acknowledged that the ACA is not perfect and needs work. It was never supposed to be the final bill, but political circumstances made it so, she said.

"The challenge has been to make this bill as good as it can be and be prepared to fix it," Campbell stated. "It's better than what we have now."

The health care law will help restore some social justice to the nation, she said.

Campbell talked about a woman named Margaret, who lost her job during the recession and subsequently lost her health care. She wasn't able to afford preventative care, developed terminal cancer and died.

"Margaret should not have died. It is part of my

pro-life stance to stand for people like Margaret to make sure they have coverage," Campbell said. "In the richest nation on earth, it is shocking to me that people, because they lose their jobs, don't have coverage."

Some controversy surrounded Campbell's appearance Thursday after Bishop Paul Swain of the Sioux Falls Diocese wrote a letter to clergy Wednesday about statements Campbell made in the Press & Dakotan and elsewhere in advance of the lecture.

He took issue with her views on the ACA and, in particular, on the Department of Health and Human Services contraception mandate.

"Those who seek to know what the Church really teaches should look to the statements of the Bishops," Swain wrote. "Her position is both personal and wrong."

Dr. Joseph Benoit, the president of Mount Marty College, told the Press & Dakotan Wednesday that he was "a little disappointed" when he saw the document since Swain had approved Campbell's appearance in the spring.

Benoit said it is important for an educational institution like Mount Marty College to look at issues like health care.

Award

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The Al Neuarth Award for Excellence in the Media recognizes the achievements of journalists from across the country. The award is named after USD graduate and USA *Today* founder Al Neuarth, a native of Eureka. He died last spring.

Past recipients of the award: Walter Cronkite (1989); Carl T. Rowan (1990); Helen Thomas (1991); Tom Brokaw (1992); Larry King (1993); Charles Kuralt (1994); Albert R. Hunt and Judy Woodruff (1995); Robert MacNeil (1996); Cokie Roberts (1997); Tim Russert and Louis D. Boccardi (1998); John Seigenthaler (1999); Jim Lehrer (2001); Tom Curley (2002); Don He-

witt (2004); Garrison Keillor (2005); Bob Schieffer (2006); John Quinn and Ken Paulson (2007); Charles Overby (2008); Katie Couric (2009); Cathie Black and Frank Vega (2010); Brian Lamb (2011); Marilyn Hagerty (2012).

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