

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Friday, September 30, 2011

Contact: Perry Plumart, 202-224-1638
Jeff Gohringer, 202-224-1770

South Dakota's Angels in Adoption

By U.S. Senator Tim Johnson (D-SD)

Each year, I recognize one South Dakota family as Angels in Adoption. Folks across the state nominate families in their community that have opened their hearts and homes to children. Every family that was nominated this year was remarkable, but when I read about Nora and Randy Boesem of Newell, South Dakota, I was incredibly inspired. They are a caring, selfless couple and my 2011 Angels in Adoption.

Nora and Randy have adopted nine children. All of the kids are affected by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders (FASD). FASD is an umbrella term that describes a range of physical and mental birth defects that can occur in a fetus as a result of a pregnant woman drinking alcohol. People affected with these disorders face numerous medical, physical, educational, and financial challenges. In addition to their adopted children, the Boesems have also opened their home to nearly 70 children through the foster care system over the last 10 years.

While helping her own children overcome obstacles associated with these disorders, Nora is also an outspoken advocate for those affected by FASD. She works to raise awareness about the effects of fetal alcohol exposure in our state, which has one of the highest rates in the nation. Nora founded Roots to Wings, a support and advocacy group and also sits on the board of advisors of the FASD Center at the Cheisman Center for Democracy in Rapid City.

I will continue working with advocates like Nora in our state on legislation I introduced last year to require various Federal agencies to develop a research agenda, improve the ability to screen and identify disorders, and facilitate the development of statewide systems and community partnerships. The *Advancing FASD Research, Prevention, and Services Act* would also provide federal grants for pilot projects to determine and implement the best practices for educating children with FASD within the school system, as well as educating professionals about services for children.

In South Dakota, nearly 1,500 children are in the foster care system. Unfortunately, approximately 75 children on average "age out" of the foster care system each year before they are adopted. As a founding member of the Congressional Coalition on Adoption, which sponsors Angels in Adoption, I have worked both to raise awareness and improve the adoption process in America. I support making an adoption tax credit permanent to help lessen the financial burden families face when adopting a child. Proceedings and legal fees for some domestic adoptions can cost more than \$40,000.

It warms my heart each year to read the nominations of families in South Dakota for Angels in Adoption. I hear about the great sacrifices many families across our state make to improve the lives of children and the happiness that families have experienced from adoption. My life has been personally touched by adoption since 2007 when my son Brendan and his wife Jana adopted two children from Ethiopia. Our family has been enriched by Trualem and Peneal and I can't express enough the positive impact that adoption can have on children and families. As we approach National Adoption Month in November, I encourage everyone to visit www.childwelfare.gov to learn more about adoption and find out ways you can support families like the Boesems.