

BOYS DISCUSS LEGISLATIVE PROCESSES

Seventeen boys from the Older Boys Program at The Club for Boys in Rapid City participated in a forum titled *The Role of Citizens in the Legislative Process* on February 18. These boys, ranging in age from 12 - 17, looked at pros and cons of different approaches to citizen involvement in legislative processes.

The boys felt it was important for citizens to know what is going on so that good decisions could be made when voting. To know what is going on, they suggested getting information from many types of media and from various sources. They also noted that a parent may not have enough knowledge about an issue and that the people reporting may not either. In an example given of the recent issue considered by the Rapid City Council to require ice-cream vendors who drive through neighborhoods to pass a criminal background check as part of licensing, the boys could see the point of view of a mother who wants to protect her child, but did not yet have enough age or experience to know why a vendor may think differently.

Legislators need to hear their side of the story when it comes to issues, the boys felt, because their opinions can help legislators fix problems. Though they recognized the difficulty in listening to every single person because there would be so many different responses, they came up with the idea that people such as their program director could speak for them because he has access to them.

Citizens can participate in legislative processes, they said, by voting, writing to the president, volunteering to do community service, running for office, etc. They also recognized the barrier of the amount of money needed to run for office and the need for popularity, or name recognition. Another barrier they identified is that some people can be lazy about participating.

Positive comments were given by the boys regarding the forum process. They liked the relaxed style and the lack of desks. Everyone having a chance to talk was also appreciated.

Jay Redmond, Older Boys Program Director, saw the boys' interest during the forum and said afterward he was pleased with their participation and that the boys will surely continue to talk about the topic with him later. South Dakota Issues Forums provides participants the opportunity to voice their opinions and to think about the benefits and drawbacks of different actions. The South Dakota Issues Forums thanks The Club for Boys for collaborating in involving their older boys in this type of civic participation.

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February 19, 2009



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