



Networking opportunity provides foundation for a career

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Speakout

Networking, networking, and more networking. That's what students hear from career experts as we prepare for a post-collegiate world. As a senior graduating this summer with a degree in Agriculture Business, I was recently afforded an incredible experience that allowed me to meet and talk with nearly 1,000 individuals in the renewable fuels industry, including former South Dakota Senator (and fellow SDSU Jackrabbit) Tom Daschle. Talk about networking potential!

Thanks to a scholarship I earned, I was able to attend the Renewable Fuels Association's 24th annual National Ethanol Conference (NEC), held Feb. 11-13 in Orlando. I was thrilled for the opportunity to learn more about the U.S. ethanol industry, network with a variety of stakeholders, and of course escape this brutal South Dakota winter for a few days.

The NEC is the most widely attended executive level conference for the ethanol industry. I sought to attend the NEC for two reasons: 1) to gain valuable insight into the issues and future challenges facing the ethanol industry, and 2) to establish connections that will be crucial for the career in agricultural policy and international trade that I plan to pursue. The NEC delivered well above expectations in both areas.

The U.S. ethanol industry is vitally important to our economy and our environment, plus South Dakota is home to some 15 ethanol plants, providing a

significant contribution to our country. Thanks to an analysis by ABF Economics released during the NEC, I learned that South Dakota's ethanol plants provide \$1.8 million in gross domestic product (GDP) and more than 14,000 jobs to our state. That's quite an impressive contribution to our state's economy!

The lineup of speakers and panelists that RFA put together was exceptional. One of the sessions I found particularly enjoyable was the petroleum market outlook given by Philip K. Verleger. Through books I've recently read, I've become strongly interested in how the shale oil revolution and America's coming energy independence will reshape global markets and global politics. As such, I found his insight into the effects increased shale oil production will have on global diesel markets and prices fascinating. His forecast of \$1 per gallon gasoline and \$6-plus per gallon diesel prices by 2020 was eye-opening and rather alarming coming from an agricultural background. Also, I love politics, so I found the luncheon with Mark McKinnon, co-host of Showtime's "The Circus," and CNN commentator Paul Begala to be quite delightful. They delivered their views on the current and future political arenas in a balanced, insightful, and humorous manner.

Networking and connection opportunities were abundant at the NEC. I was fortunate enough to meet individuals in a variety of roles in the industry, from ethanol producers and farmers to sales representatives who supply inputs and equipment. In addition, it was also great to meet the RFA staff who work diligently to advocate for ethanol and its economic, environmental, and vehicle performance benefits.

Attending the NEC provided me with invaluable assets that will be a crucial foundation for my future career. I was able to learn a great deal about the ethanol industry, while connecting with many great individuals. The experience exceeded my expectations and I'm incredibly thankful for the opportunity.