



South Dakota – CPAC Scorecard

Center for Legislative Analysis

11th Edition – 2024

Summary

The latest edition of the South Dakota CPAC Scorecard assesses 12 votes in the South Dakota State Senate and 12 votes in the South Dakota State House from the 2024 session. South Dakota Republicans earned an average conservative rating of 68% while Democrats had an average rating of 17%. This is a decline from 2023 when Republicans earned an average rating of 71% and Democrats averaged 39%.

Despite being a solidly Republican state, the South Dakota state government has grown its budget and engaged in wasteful spending in recent years. In 2024 the legislature passed a \$2 million giveaway for elderly voters, a new Public Health laboratory (\$7 million) and a glitzy expansion of the state fair grounds (\$8 million). South Dakota also passed some conservative reforms, but most were modest in scope.

Key Takeaways

Lawmakers advanced several bills expanding individual freedoms and security.

SB 203 allowed individuals with concealed carry permits to carry firearms on school grounds, a move CPAC strongly supported as a reaffirmation of Second Amendment rights. Likewise, **SJR 501** proposed adding work requirements for able-bodied adults seeking Medicaid benefits, emphasizing personal responsibility in welfare programs. Both measures reflect a push toward greater self-reliance and personal accountability within the state. Their passage illustrates a willingness to challenge federal or progressive norms on guns and welfare. Together, they represent legislative victories for conservative governance.

CPAC's energy policy remains consistent in opposing subsidies for specific fuel types.

SB 78 created a new five-cent-per-gallon refund for E-15 renewable fuel, a clear example of the government picking winners and losers in the energy market. While CPAC supports an “all-of-the-above” approach to energy, it rejects policies that artificially boost one form of energy over another. This bill shifted taxpayer dollars to benefit licensed gasoline marketers selling a particular blend, undermining free-market principles. Despite these concerns, it sailed through the Senate with unanimous support and became law. The passage highlights a bipartisan tendency toward energy favoritism despite calls for neutrality.

The legislature continued to expand taxpayer spending on social initiatives disguised as quality-of-life improvements.

SB 80 allocated \$2 million to help healthcare providers purchase technology to improve the lives of elderly citizens. While it was framed as a compassionate move, CPAC opposed the bill on the grounds that taxpayers should not be compelled to fund such targeted benefits. The organization argues that these efforts resemble political vote-buying rather than responsible governance. Even with a few dissenting votes, the Senate overwhelmingly approved the measure, and it became law. This reflects a persistent willingness to grow government spending beyond core functions.

Cultural and national security concerns also shaped the session's priorities.

HB 1178 prohibited taxpayer-funded institutions from hosting or promoting obscene live conduct, effectively stopping drag shows sponsored by the Board of Regents. CPAC supported this measure as a safeguard for public decency and proper use of public funds. Similarly, **HB 1231** banned countries of concern—like China and Russia—from purchasing agricultural land in South Dakota, a move aimed at protecting domestic security. Both bills passed easily, demonstrating bipartisan agreement on cultural and security-focused issues. These actions highlight how state lawmakers are addressing both moral and geopolitical challenges through legislation.

Highlighted Votes Analyzed

SJR 501 Attempting to Insert Work Requirements for Medicaid.

This resolution proposes a constitutional amendment to voters that would allow the state to require an able-bodied adult below the retirement age to work in order to receive Medicaid benefits. CPAC supports work requirements in the welfare systems and supported this bill. The Senate passed this bill on January 25, 2024 by a vote of 28-4 and the bill later became law.

HB 1178 Stopping the Board of Regents from Sponsoring Drag Shows.

This bill prohibits the South Dakota Board of Regents from allowing any institutions under its control to host or promote obscene live conduct. CPAC believes that taxpayers should not be forced to subsidize obscene performances and supported this bill. The Senate passed this bill on February 27, 2024 by a vote of 27-5 and the bill later became law.

HB 1231 No Agricultural Land for Foreign Countries of Concern in South Dakota.

This bill prohibits China, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Russia, and Venezuela from buying agricultural land in South Dakota. CPAC supports appropriate efforts to protect the US' domestic security and supported this bill. The Senate passed this bill on February 23, 2024 by a vote of 30-2 and the bill later became law.

Trends and Observations

State government spending remains far above 2019 levels

South Dakota's state budget remains at about 150% of the level that it was at in 2019. In the 2024 session, legislators voted to add even more spending items. South Dakota taxpayers will now pay for \$2 million of technology for elderly people (**SB 80**) a new public health laboratory priced at \$7 million (**SB 781**) and a glitzy new multi-use building on the state fair grounds (**HB 1065**). Legislators also created a new ethanol subsidy (**SB 78**).

South Dakota's conservative reforms were modest in scope

South Dakota Republicans took action to address important conservative priorities, but the actions were modest. **SB 203** protects the second amendment by allowing people with concealed carry permits to carry firearms on school grounds. **HB 1178** stops the state government from using tax dollars to sponsor drag shows. **HB 1231** prohibits hostile foreign countries from buying land in South Dakota.

Property rights gained a notable victory with SB 89, which restored key powers to landlords.

The bill reaffirmed that property owners should have the discretion to terminate tenancies at will, reasserting control over their assets. CPAC supported this measure as an important correction against overregulation that can trap owners in disadvantageous situations. Opponents argued it could create instability for renters, but the majority favored strengthening ownership rights. The 28-4 Senate vote and subsequent enactment into law signal broad legislative alignment with free-market property principles. This win for property rights underscores CPAC's emphasis on reducing state interference in private contracts.

Resolutions reaffirmed South Dakota's conservative stance on abortion and immigration.

HCR 6008 expressed the legislature's opposition to making abortion a constitutional right, reinforcing the state's pro-life values. **HCR 6010** declared support for federal efforts to combat illegal immigration and recognized the crisis at the Southern border. CPAC supported both resolutions as statements of principle that align with its broader mission. While resolutions do not carry the force of law, they signal clear political intent and legislative priorities. Their passage by wide margins confirms the state's strong conservative identity on social and national policy issues.

Conservative Excellence - Senate

Julie Frye-Mueller - 92%

Conservative Excellence - House

Aaron Aylward - 92%
Liz May - 91%

Tina Mulally - 91%

Tony Randolph - 92%

Conservative Achievement - Senate

Brent Hoffman - 83%

Tom Pischke - 83%

Conservative Achievement - House

Randy Gross - 83%
Phil Jensen - 83%

Karla Lems - 83%

Bethany Soye - 83%