

Keillor mixes congenial stories with criticism in USD speech

VERMILLION, S.D. (AP) — Radio host and writer Garrison Keillor mixed folksy stories with pointed criticism in a speech Thursday at the DakotaDome.

The University of South Dakota stop was the second visit to the state this year for the host of public radio's "A Prairie Home Companion" and "The Writer's Almanac."

His speech, "Why I Am Trying to be More Truthful," included recollections of Keillor's trips through South Dakota as a boy, the importance of story telling in journalism, stories from his Minnesota roots and, of course, tales from the fictional Lake Wobe-

gon. He wore a dark suit with a red tie and trademark red shoes and socks. Keillor sat on a stool on a stage set up on the 50-yard line of the indoor football field.

The audience laughed along at the colorful, convoluted tale of a Lake Wobegon wedding that went awry and turned into a party for 24 Lutheran ministers who were in Minnesota for a "fact-finding mission." The closing tale drew a standing ovation.

"That's the story I came to tell. Thank you so much for sitting still for it."

Some in the audience also applauded Keillor's disapproval of

President Bush's pick of Harriet Miers for the U.S. Supreme Court, the bureaucracy of the Department of Homeland Security and a bill that would impose stiff fines on broadcasters for obscene, profane or indecent material.

"This is an example of government gone amok," he said.

The 90-minute program was presented by the Freedom Forum and USD as part of the Al Neuharth Legacy Series, which features speakers who have demonstrated achievement and leadership in the media.

The series is named for USA Today and Freedom Forum

founder Al Neuharth, a Eureka native and 1950 USD graduate.

"Al Neuharth's South Dakota persistence persuaded Mr. Keillor to come to Vermillion," said Jack Marsh, director of the Freedom Forum's Al Neuharth Media Center at USD. "He hopes to someday bring 'Prairie Home Companion' to Vermillion."

Keillor was initially chosen to receive Neuharth's annual award that honors people in the media, but Keillor told him: "I don't do awards."

Neuharth was taken aback at first but eventually cajoled Keillor to speak without being honored.