Senator Pat Roberts, whose leadership on crucial committees has given him a national voice in the political process, became the first speaker in a lecture series expected to bring influential leaders to the Southwestern College campus.

The Docking Lecture Series on Leadership and Public Affairs, underwritten by one of the state’s most remarkable political families, kicked off Oct. 11 as Roberts spoke on bipartisanship to a large crowd of students, faculty and administrators, and community members in Richardson Auditorium.

Roberts called the politics in America “ balkanized” despite great governmental achievements of the past that required nonpartisan effort.

“Certainly the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation, Women’s Suffrage, the Civil Rights Act, Social Security, Medicare and the G. I. Bill of Rights are examples of how national leaders put the good of our country above themselves and above their political aspirations of power in seeking the greater good,” Roberts pointed out. “They allowed, even encouraged their parties to flow together, to work in harmony for a better America. This political unity of the nations’ leaders resulted in unity among our citizens…. (I)t is a simple fact that if any nation’s leaders allow themselves to be polarized, that nation’s citizens will act accordingly. In America today, we are politicized, polarized, and balkanized.”

However, Roberts went on to say, signs exist that bipartisanship still can work. He pointed out his cooperation with Sen. Ted Kennedy on legislation affecting both child care and senior nutrition.

“Recently, Third District Congressman Dennis Moore, a Democrat, and I spoke at a forum in Overland Park where we talked about bipartisanship in Washington. We had just left D.C. after a bitter debate over Iraq and troop levels. The presidential campaigns, already in full swing, were dominating the summer news, and yet we had a packed house at the forum because people were curious whether these two perspectives from two opposite sides of the aisle would be at odds and full of gloom and doom over the state of political affairs in this country,” Robert said. “But I can tell you there was more agreement than disagreement between us during the 90-minute conversation. Both of us could cite many examples throughout our careers, where we had come together from outside the party structure to make a difference for Kansas.”

He described the efforts to fund recovery for Greensburg as an outstanding example of bipartisanship.

The Docking Lecture Series is being funded by the Docking family, with leadership from Bill Docking, Arkansas City; Tom Docking, Wichita; and Union State Bank.

“We are pleased that Senator Roberts agreed to present the first lecture,” said William Docking, CEO of Union State Bank. “His participation underscores our commitment to featuring lecturers from a variety of perspectives who are committed to playing constructive roles in addressing important public issues.”

As the lecture series develops, President Dick Merriman added, the college will host one or two lectures each school year. “The Landon Lecture at Kansas State University and the Dillon Lectures in Hutchinson have provided us a model,” Merriman said. Where it is appropriate and can be arranged, a second presentation of a Docking Lecture may be offered in Wichita.