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SD Department of Veterans Affairs  
Secretary Zimmerman December 2018 Column

Great Chapter in my Book of Life!

With pen in hand I struggle to write this, my last column as Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. Perhaps Winnie the Pooh said it best when he said “How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.”

I’m very thankful that Governor Dugaard invited me to be part of his team advocating for South Dakotans. It has been an experience and a journey that I will always treasure. Every day I was afforded the opportunity to visit with at least a dozen veterans and every day veterans’ lives were augmented.

There is no mystery behind the endurance and the success of American liberty. It is because in every generation, from the Revolutionary War to this very hour, brave Americans have stepped forward and served honorably in the Armed Forces of the United States. Every one of them deserves the thanks and the admiration of our entire country and they deserve our support as they heal the wounds of war.

It is important to remember that no matter where or when our veterans have served, they’ve always served with distinction. Service to country is a bridge over which more than 38 million Americans have passed during time of war. It was built on courage, dedication and patriotism— keystones in our American way of life and we must never forget their dedication and commitment to this great country and our allies.

During my tenure with the Department we embarked on Operations RAV (Reaching All Veterans), Ketchup, KII (Korean Veteran Recognition), Saigon, Taiwan, Whirlwind and CARS (Calling All Returning Servicemembers), and all with the mission to find and enhance the lives of our veterans. There has been no greater reward than to be able to thank veterans for their service and help resolve issues they may have been facing. There is much to commemorate, and much to be thankful for. It is true that America is strong and free. But we must never forget that we would never have come this far without the heroes we call veterans.

We also expanded many educational opportunities for our veterans, launched South Dakota Joining Forces, improved veterans preference, funded military funeral honors program, got involved with the veterans courts, designed and opened the doors of a state veterans home under budget, developed and grew a platform to work with incarcerated veterans and their families, increased awareness of homeownership challenges facing tribal veterans, and grew the benefits secured for our veterans by over 25 percent.

It's been a great journey and I am so thankful for the opportunities I have been afforded and the veterans I have met. I'm proud of and thankful for the team that I call my family; the team that has been by my side during this journey --- my wife and family, the SDDVA staff, county and tribal veterans service officers, members of the veterans service organizations and auxiliaries, staff at all of the South Dakota VA healthcare facilities and vet centers, members of the Veterans Commission and the Veterans Council. You have been and will always be the greatest partners anyone could ask for.

This journey generated hundreds of rewards as well. There is pride in developing one's character and becoming a leader, serving a cause far greater than any self-interest. In the words of Clint Black – "I'm leaving here a better man."

Signing out dear friends - My Mission is Completed (Operation MMC)!

May Peace be your gift at Christmas and your blessing all year through!

Larry Zimmerman, Secretary  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs