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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**SDDVA Secretary Whitlock's January Column – Taking Care of Veterans, an Unending Legacy**

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (SDDVA) is an essential advocate for veterans, offering personal case development and tracking state and federal claims for benefits that veterans have earned. We focus on our core mission of providing professional-level representation to obtain federal and state benefits, reinforcing our reputation as one of the most educated and experienced team of advocates.

We have seen a significant increase in claims filings over the last three years. SDDVA and our partners obtained more than \$378 million in compensation and pension payments for veterans and their survivors in 2023.

In the military, personnel do not leave until the mission is complete. So, although we have secured great benefits for our veterans, there is always more to be done.

SDDVA has a new program called "What's Brewing." This program is a great opportunity for our leadership team to visit with veterans and hear first-hand about the issues they are experiencing, as well as allow for the opportunity for veterans to hear about new benefits and services. As the advocate for South Dakota veterans, we need to know what challenges our veterans and their families are facing.

You will also find our outreach team at such events as Veterans Day programs, Congressional forums, the State Fair, County Fairs, Memorial Day programs, VA sponsored events, Stand Downs, and Yellow Ribbons.

We encourage veterans to join our outreach events for conversation, information, and resources on benefits. Veterans can check out our calendar for outreach events in their area at <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/publicaffairs/upcomingevents.aspx>.

We have also launched another new program, Operation VNF (Veterans Never Forgotten). VNF affords us the opportunity to communicate with our veterans in long term care facilities. This battle plan has three pathways – to visit with veterans, connect veterans with their local county or tribal veterans service officer, and educate the administrators about the need for VA approved rooms for veterans.

At the end of each day, our true measure of success will be the timeliness, the quality, and the consistency of the services provided to our veterans. They deserve nothing less.

To all those who have faithfully served, we thank you!

Greg Whitlock, Secretary  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs