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**For more information, contact:** Audry Ricketts at 605-773-8242 or [audry.ricketts@state.sd.us](mailto:audry.ricketts@state.sd.us)  
(South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs)

SD Department of Veterans Affairs  
Secretary Zimmerman February 2017 Column

**VETERANS, THE PULSE OF OUR COUNTRY!**

There are a number of different visions associated with love, such as cupids and roses, but out of all the various symbols and images, none are more established than the heart.

On Valentine's Day, men and women around the world express their feelings of love with cards, chocolates, balloons, flowers, cookies, cakes, cupcakes, and other gifts; all of them decked with or designed in the form of traditional hearts.

It's not difficult to figure out the connection between the heart and Valentine's Day. The heart, after all, was thought in ancient times to be the source of all emotions. It later came to be associated only with the emotion of love.

Remember your heart beats daily with your individual pulse! The heartbeat of America is driven by veterans and their pulse for freedom. These men and women represent everything that our nation fights to protect, everything we value in life. Our honor, our liberty, our livelihood, lies with them.

The patriotism in their hearts is what allows everyday life to continue unimpeded; it is how they advance and do what they must for the good of the country. The veterans in our country show the most valued trait; selflessness, putting their country before themselves.

Over the next several years, more than a million service members will take off their uniform for the last time. These men and women have displayed extraordinary strength and resilience. They sacrificed personally for the greater good. They demonstrated remarkable perseverance in the face of adversity to protect the freedoms we enjoy daily. They showed care and compassion for those in need – many times at the risk of their own lives and they lived by the core values of duty, honor, and country; and in doing so, earned our trust, our support and our love.

Hearts in February are special on Valentine's Day, but without the continuous beat and constant vigilance that our service members and veterans have for freedom, the pulse would go quiet.

We benefitted --- every one of us --- from their service and sacrifice. Let's be there for them the same way they were there for us.

Caring for veterans is the very heart of President Lincoln's charge to every American in his second inaugural address near the end of our bloody Civil War. In 1865, President Lincoln directed us to care for those "who shall have borne the battle," and for their families and their survivors.

Our team, at the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, stands ready to answer President Lincoln's charge. We have great resources to assist our veterans in obtaining their benefits. We

encourage veterans to reach out to our staff, our county and tribal veterans service officers and our veterans service organizations. All of these partners are a free resource to help veterans and their families. They are there to educate them on benefits, assist in the application process and will lead the charge when an appeal is needed.

Remember your sweetheart this month, but listen for the pulse of your veterans who have fought with all their heart for our country.

Larry Zimmerman, Secretary  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs