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(South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs)

SD Department of Veterans Affairs  
Secretary Zimmerman January 2017 Column

Happy New Year everyone! We wish you a terrific 2017 filled with happiness and good fortune.

Brad Paisley once said, "Tomorrow is the first blank page of a 365-page book. Write a good one."

Let's ensure that our 2017 book is not left blank! Let's write a good one!

Our 2016 book was full of projects, accomplishments and stories. During 2016 we honored over 1,000 Korean War Veterans, we helped Vietnam War Veterans celebrate the tenth anniversary of the dedication of their memorial, participated in numerous welcome home and outreach events, and opened the doors to a new state-of-the-art veteran's home. We partnered with the Department of the Military to create South Dakota Joining Forces; an initiative to grow community support for veterans, service members and their families. We improved veteran's preference status, provided numerous training programs for our county and tribal veteran's service officers, assisted incarcerated veterans, served on committees for Veterans Courts and increased the number of nursing home beds at the State Veterans Home. In addition, our staff worked closely with veterans to secure over \$170 Million in compensation and pension benefits for veterans.

Each year we set new priorities to reflect the needs of all generations of veterans. As always, we encourage veterans to contact their local County or Tribal Veterans Service Officer to determine eligibility of benefits.

How many of you buy books, gadgets, or tools, only to let them sit on the shelf - never to be used? Of course you don't! But according to our records, only 2,300 veterans in South Dakota are using their GI Bill benefits and the On-the-Job Training and Apprenticeship program. The result for those not using the benefit is that 36 months of education they have paid for is sitting on the shelf unused. That education benefit is part of what veterans earned for their service so why not collect it and use it? Why not add a chapter to your book?

As a veteran you have shown you have the talents to get things done under difficult circumstances. Build on that by picking up the right tools and improving what you have. Veterans from Vietnam Era, Post 9/11 and Gulf War Era should give our team a call and visit with them about education benefits, free tuition and housing allowances (605-773-3269).

We truly enjoy interacting with veterans, service members, and their families throughout our great state. We have tremendous partners at federal, state, and local levels who work tirelessly to ensure great outcomes. We are all here to work with our veterans.

Let's make sure our 2017 book has numerous pages and is a best seller. Keep the book open and continue to add chapters to your journal.

Larry Zimmerman, Secretary  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs