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SD Department of Veterans Affairs
Secretary Zimmerman March 2017 Column

Veterans Keep Marching On

George Washington once said, “When we assumed the soldier, we did not lay aside the citizen.”

There was no waiting line for our men and women in uniform when they raised their right hands and volunteered to serve. There shouldn't be a waiting line when they return home and need our help getting the care they've earned.

Unfortunately, it took the government thirty plus years to recognize that there was a link between Agent Orange and the devastating health effects on our service members. Veterans waited decades to get the care they desperately needed and clearly earned. The VA now recognizes certain cancers and other health problems as presumptive diseases associated with exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides during military service. Veterans are encouraged to partake in the VA's Agent Orange Registry health exam to ensure that the research continues, presumptives are recognized and care is provided to our veterans.

Conflicts change, contaminants change, but the fact that our heroes are exposed to these toxins has not changed.

Recently the VA launched the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry in response to concerns that veterans who deployed after 1990 were experiencing a range of respiratory illnesses. The goal of the registry is to help researchers study the health effects of burn pits and other airborne hazards. We encourage veterans to visit the registry site (www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/burnpits/registry.asp) to ensure that our heroes will not have to wait four decades for resolution.

Wars, conflicts and battles have been fought throughout the years and continue today. Continued research is vital if we are to complete our promise to take care of the men and women who served.

Larry Zimmerman, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs