



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## SDDVA HOSTS MINI CONFERENCES

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs hosted three Mini Conferences this week in Rapid City, Pierre, and Sioux Falls.

SDDVA Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard, Claims Office Manager Brett Dickerson, and SDDVA Field Service Officers Will Huffmon, Kevin Bowen, Kevin Swanson, Guy Arnold, and DJ Montreal provided county and tribal veterans service officers with updates on 2024 legislative changes, VA healthcare, PACT Act, VA ratings, VetraSpec, the role of SDDVA FSO's and VSO's, and accreditation. This team then provided hands-on training on packaging a claim and reviewed updated VA forms.



Table of Contents

- Military Appreciation Month ..... 2-3
- What's Brewing ..... 4
- Midwest Honor Flight Training ... 5
- Schild Poker Run ..... 6
- Flatlander Poker Run ..... 7
- Carry the Load ..... 8
- SDDVA Memorial Day ..... 9
- VA Care Expansion ..... 10-11
- Sioux Falls Memorial Day ..... 12
- Roberts County Chow Line ..... 13
- Fareway Honor Flight Fundraiser 14
- Upcoming Events ..... 15-16



SDDVA's next training opportunity for tribal and county veterans service officers will be the SDDVA annual benefit school September 3-5 in Sioux Falls.



# NATIONAL MILITARY APPRECIATION MONTH

Governor Kristi Noem, in coordination with the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, has proclaimed May as “National Military Appreciation Month,” a time for all to honor, remember, recognize, and appreciate those who have served in the past and those now serving, as well as their families.

“The vigilance of the members of the Armed Forces has been instrumental to the preservation of freedom, security, and prosperity enjoyed by the people of this great nation,” Governor Noem said in her proclamation. “Our Armed Forces depend on the dedicated service of its members and their families.”

National Military Appreciation Month includes Loyalty Day on May 1st, Military Spouse Appreciation Day on May 10th, Victory in Europe Day on May 8th, Armed Forces Day on May 18th, and Memorial Day on May 27th. May is also Gold Star Awareness Month, providing us the opportunity to pay tribute to the families of our fallen heroes.

“The month of May affords us many occasions to thank those who have served, and their families,” said Greg Whitlock, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. “These men and women continue to play a major role in the development of our country

through their uncompromising honor, dedication to duty, and genuine love of country.”

For generations, brave Americans have stepped forward and answered the call to serve in our Armed Forces. With honor and distinction, our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and Guardians fight to defend the principles upon which our country was founded. Behind these courageous Americans stand spouses, children, and parents who give up precious time with their loved ones, bearing the burden of long deployments and difficult moves, and oftentimes putting their careers on hold. During National Military Appreciation Month, we salute the families of those who are proud parts of our Nation's unbroken chain of patriots for their unwavering devotion, and we renew our sacred vow to uphold our promise to our troops, our veterans, and their families.





***Executive Proclamation***  
*State of South Dakota*  
*Office of the Governor*

*Whereas*, Congress has designated May as National Military Appreciation Month to ensure the nation publicly demonstrates their appreciation for the sacrifices and successes made by our service members - past and present; and,

*Whereas*, the vigilance of the members of the Armed Forces has been instrumental to the preservation of freedom, security, and prosperity enjoyed by the people of this great nation; and,

*Whereas*, the success of the Armed Forces depends on the dedicated service of its members and their families; and,

*Whereas*, Loyalty Day, Victory in Europe Day, Military Spouse Appreciation Day, Armed Forces Day, and Memorial Day provide opportunities to learn more about military members and the families who have given of themselves to support and defend the principles we hold dear:

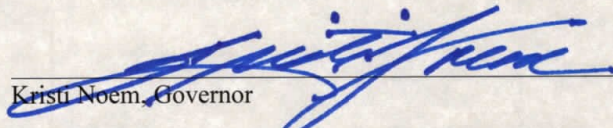
*Now, Therefore, I, Kristi Noem*, Governor of the State of South Dakota, do hereby proclaim May 2024, as

***MILITARY APPRECIATION MONTH***

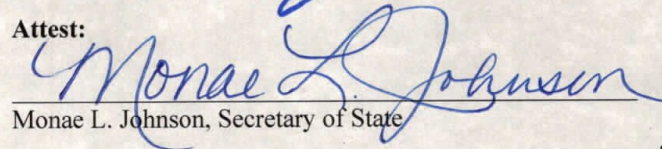
in South Dakota, and I urge all citizens, businesses, and government leaders to observe the month with appropriate ceremonies and activities that honor, support, and thank our military families.



*In Witness Whereof*, I have hereunto set my hand and caused to be affixed the Great Seal of the State of South Dakota, in Pierre, the Capital City, this Ninth Day of April in the Year of Our Lord, Two Thousand and Twenty-Four.

  
Kristi Noem, Governor

Attest:

  
Monae L. Johnson, Secretary of State



# WHAT'S BREWING

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting a “Coffee and Conversation” program in McIntosh. This program is in partnership with Corson County Veterans Service Officer Kevin Dyda. The department welcomes the opportunity to visit one-on-one with veterans and see what’s brewing!

The “What’s Brewing” program will be held Tuesday, May 7, at the McIntosh Pavilion (Main and First Avenue) at 10:00 am (MT).

“What’s Brewing’ is a great opportunity for us to visit with veterans and hear about the challenges they might be experiencing firsthand. These programs also allow us the opportunity to speak with them about new benefits and services,” said SDDVA Secretary Greg Whitlock. “As the advocates for South Dakota veterans, we need to hear about the things our veterans are facing. We walk among veterans every day, and yet we may not even realize the magnitude of their sacrifices to serve our country.”

The SDDVA team and CVSO Dyda will address questions about veteran’s benefits including compensation, education, pension, healthcare, burial, state veterans cemetery, and state veterans home.

We encourage veterans to join us if they can. As always, they can reach our SDDVA team at 605.333.6869, or they can locate their county or tribal veterans service officer by visiting <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/veteransserviceofficers/locatevso.aspx>.



**Veterans,  
See  
What’s  
Brewing!**



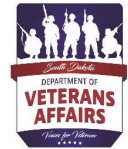
**We invite all veterans to join us for a  
“Veterans Coffee and Networking.”  
Free coffee and treats while you chat with new and old friends  
alike and learn more about veterans benefits from the South  
Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs.**

**Tuesday—May 7, 2024**

**10:00 am (MT)**

**McIntosh Pavilion**

**(Main Street and First Avenue—McIntosh)**



# MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT GUARDIAN TRAINING

Last weekend, Midwest Honor Flight conducted their spring training for guardians that will be traveling with veterans on Midwest Honor Flight Missions 18, 19, and 20.

Every veteran participating in the tours is provided a guardian. Guardians are asked to treat their heroes as if they are family and ensure they have a safe, memorable, and rewarding experience.

Serving as guardians from within our veteran network are SDDVA Field Service Officer Kevin Bowen, SDDVA State Veterans Service Officer David Denson, and Davison County Veterans Service Officer TJ Thomas.

Visit this link to learn more about serving as a guardian:  
<https://www.midwesthonorflight.org/guardians>

Spring/Summer missions are as follows:

May 7—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 18

May 21—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 19

Jun 5—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 20





# RICH SCHILD MEMORIAL POKER RUN

The Rich Schild Memorial Poker Run will be held Saturday, June 1, in Tabor. Proceeds from the run assist expenses for the annual fireworks display during Czech Days in Tabor.

SFC Richard Schild, known to many as RAMROD 7, joined the South Dakota Army National Guard on January 31, 1992, and was assigned to Charlie Battery, 1st Battalion, 147th Field Artillery Brigade based out of Yankton.

On December 4, 2005, Schild's platoon was traveling in a convoy in Baghdad. Schild was killed instantly when their convoy was attacked by insurgents using improvised explosive devices.



**RICH SCHILD  
MEMORIAL  
POKER RUN**

EVERYONE AND EVERYTHING IS WELCOME...  
CARS, PICKUPS, MOTORCYCLES, BUSES, ETC., ETC.. ETC.

**SAT, JUNE 1ST**  
**REGISTRATION BEGINS AT**  
**12:00 AT THE KEG**  
**IN TABOR - \$20 ENTRY**  
**1PM START**

ALL PROCEEDS HELP PAY FOR THE  
FIREWORKS DISPLAY DURING CZECH DAYS  
**DOOR PRIZES**  
**50/50 Split**

Rich's greatest loves were family, friends, the Minnesota Vikings, Christmas, and the Fourth of July fireworks. Oprah Winfrey once said, "You have to find what sparks a light in you so that you in your own way can illuminate the world." Thanks Rich, for illuminating our world!

\$20/RIDER | \$10/PASSENGER

FREE WILL DONATIONS ACCEPTED

# MILITIAMEN VMC

## FLATLANDERS CHAPTER



ALL 2024 PROCEEDS GO TO THE  
BALTIC VETERANS MEMORIAL PARK

ALL VEHICLES WELCOME

DRAWING  
RAFFLE  
PRIZES

# POKER RUN

\$300 | \$150 | \$75

Starts and Ends at

BALTIC AMERICAN LEGION | BALTIC, SD

**SATURDAY | JULY 27<sup>TH</sup>**

9:00-10:30 AM - REGISTRATION

11:00 AM - KICKSTANDS UP

5:00 PM - LAST BIKE IN



PAUL REURINK 605-270-1790

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT:  
BRIAN SIEMONSMA 605-366-4111  
TRENT EDBERG 605-988-4444



# CARRY THE LOAD

Sign up now to 'Carry the Load' and be a part of the 20,000-mile cross-country trek honoring the men and women who have died while serving in the U.S. military. The march takes place in May and will travel through 34 VA national cemeteries along five separate routes covering 48 states.

Memorial Day is a day of remembrance to honor the brave men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice in service to their country. It is a time to reflect on the sacrifices of our fallen heroes and to pay tribute to their legacy of courage, dedication and selflessness.

That is why VA's National Cemetery Administration [is partnering with Carry The Load](#) this year. Together, the goal is to honor and remember veterans interred in VA National Cemeteries.

Carry The Load, an organization dedicated to remembering the fallen, will visit 34 VA National Cemeteries traveling 20,000 miles along [five separate routes](#) covering all continental 48 states in what is known as the National Relay for Memorial May 2024.

Along the five routes, many marchers will carry signs, banners, and flags honoring a fallen service member, veteran, or first responder.

Find out when & where the National Relay will be in a city near you as supporters and volunteers walk through 48 states & hundreds of communities to honor our nation's heroes. The list of national cemeteries, along with the dates and times that they will be visited can be found at [Memorial May 2024 – National Cemetery Administration \(va.gov\)](#). Those wishing to participate in a march are asked to [register in advance](#).

Carry the Load's Memorial May Campaign will be at the Black Hills National Cemetery in Sturgis on May 16, at 3:00 pm. To learn more about the Sturgis campaign follow this link:

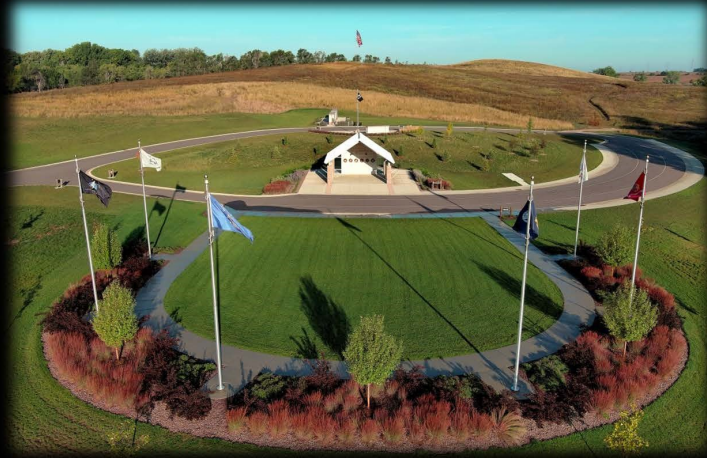
[Carry The Load's Memorial May Campaign – Sturgis, SD](#)

The VA encourages all Americans to honor a fallen service member by leaving a tribute on the Veteran's personal memorial page at VA's [Veterans Legacy Memorial](#) (VLM).

For more information please visit: [Memorial May 2024 – National Cemetery Administration \(va.gov\)](#).







*A Day to Remember and Honor  
SDDVA Memorial Day Program  
South Dakota Veterans Cemetery  
Monday—May 27, 2024*

*12:00 Noon*



*25965 477th Avenue  
Sioux Falls*

# VA EXPANDS ACCESS TO CARE AND BENEFITS FOR SOME FORMER SERVICE MEMBERS WHO DID NOT RECEIVE AN HONORABLE OR GENERAL DISCHARGE

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs [posted a final rule](#) amending its regulations regarding [character of discharge determinations](#), expanding access to VA care and benefits for some former service members discharged under other than honorable conditions or by special court-martial.

When former service members with other than honorable discharges and bad conduct discharges (adjudged at special court-martial) apply for VA benefits and services, the VA reviews their records to determine if they can provide them the requested care and benefits. This process helps ensure that the VA can provide services to deserving former service members – including certain individuals who faced discrimination, survived sexual assault or harassment, struggled with their mental or physical health, or faced other challenges while serving in the military.

The VA's new regulation will expand access to care and benefits for certain former service members by:

- **Eliminating the regulatory bar for “homosexual acts involving aggravating circumstances or other factors affecting the performance of duty” as a bar to benefits.** While the VA had already taken steps to ensure full and fair access to benefits for former service members discharged based on homosexual conduct, gender identity, or HIV status, this move further solidifies the VA's commitment to reducing disparity for these groups in the adjudication process.
- **Creating a “compelling circumstances exception” for certain former service members:** For certain former service members discharged for “willful and persistent misconduct” or an “offense involving moral turpitude,” the VA will now consider and determine if a compelling circumstances exception will permit the VA to nonetheless provide care and services. Under this exception, the VA will consider the former service member's length and character of service, mental and cognitive impairment, physical health, combat-related hardship, whether the person was the survivor of sexual abuse/assault or discrimination, and more. This new exception creates a new path for the VA to provide benefits and services to deserving former service members.

(continued on next page)



## VA EXPANSION (CONTINUES)

- **Opening the door for previously denied service members to reapply:** Because of these changes, former service members previously found ineligible for VA services may now be eligible for benefits and are encouraged to re-apply.

The VA encourages former service members with other than honorable discharges and bad conduct discharges (adjudged at special court-martial) to apply for VA care and benefits today. Over the past 10 years, VA's eligibility determination rate for these former service members has been 75% – meaning that VA provided care or benefits to 75% of them (57,000+ former service members).

“We encourage former service members with other than honorable discharges to apply for VA care and benefits today,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “Although the VA cannot change your discharge status, we want to provide you with any health care or benefits we can – and we will work with you every step of the way to do exactly that.”

“Too often, former service members believe that they cannot come to the VA due to their discharge status – but the truth is that many former service members who were not discharged honorably can get health care or benefits from VA,” said Under Secretary for Benefits, Josh Jacobs. “When you apply – as with all VA benefits – we will do everything in our power to get to yes.”

The VA has conducted extensive outreach to service members with other than honorable and bad conduct discharges adjudged at special court-martial in recent years, increasing the number who applied for VA care or benefits from approximately 1,700 in 2012 to more than 10,000 in 2023.

The VA character of discharge determination does not change the Armed Forces' characterization of service and has no effect on the former service member's military discharge status. The VA's determination is for VA benefits and services eligibility purposes only.

Any discharge characterized as “honorable” or “general – under honorable conditions” satisfies the character of discharge requirement for basic eligibility for most VA benefits. Former service members who did not receive those discharges are not automatically disqualified from receiving VA care or benefits. However, barring a ruling of insanity, the VA does not provide benefits to service members who are discharged with a “dishonorable discharge;” service members who were discharged for desertion, mutiny, going AWOL for 180 continuous days, or espionage; or service members discharged by sentence of a general court martial, discharged in lieu of trial, discharged as a “resignation by an officer for the good of the service,” or discharged as a conscientious objector. VA does apply a compelling circumstances exception for AWOL when appropriate.



# **MEMORIAL DAY**

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**REMEMBER AND HONOR THOSE  
WHO PAID THE ULTIMATE  
SACRIFICE**

**MAY 27, 2024**

**DOORS OPEN AT 9:30 AM  
PROGRAM STARTS AT 10:00 AM**

**HOSTED BY:  
THE SIOUX AREA VETERANS  
COUNCIL**

**LOCATION: THE ALLIANCE  
1600 W. RUSSELL ST.  
SIOUX FALLS, SD 57104**

**COME CELEBRATE  
WITH US**





# COMMUNITY-ORIENTED VETERANS ORGANIZATION



Roberts County, Sisseton Post 3342 VFW and Auxiliary



## MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

*Join Us!*

**Monday, May 13, 2024**

**2:00 - 7:00 PM**

**at Rosalie's Restaurant**

**9 8th Avenue E • Sisseton, SD**

**FREE MEAL**

### VFW Eligibility

For membership qualification in the Veterans of Foreign Wars, an individual must meet the following TWO requirements:

- Honorable Service.**  
Must have served in the Armed Forces of the United States and either received a discharge of Honorable or General (Under Honorable Conditions) or be currently serving.
- Service in a war, campaign, or expedition on foreign soil or in hostile waters.**  
This can be proven by any of the following:
  - An authorized campaign medal
  - Receipt of Hostile Fire Pay or Imminent Danger Pay (verified by a military pay statement)
  - Service in Korea for 30 consecutive or 60 non-consecutive days

### Auxiliary Eligibility

- GRANDDAUGHTER
- GRANDMOTHER
- GRANDFATHER
- GRANDSON
- DAUGHTER
- HUSBAND
- BROTHER
- MOTHER
- FATHER
- SISTER
- WIFE
- SON



### Vital Veterans Resources Will Be Available

- VFW/Auxiliary - Hosting  
*Commander Troy Foster*  
*Auxiliary President Tami Chase*
- Veterans Health Administration (Sioux Falls/Fargo) representee
- Veterans Benefits Administration (Sioux Falls/Fargo) representee
- Field Service Officer *Guy Arnold*
- Tribal Veteran Service Officer *Gerri Opsal*
- Roberts County Veteran Service Officer *Christopher Hicks*
- Vet Center (Mental Health) representee
- Operation Chow Line *Jill Baker*
- ATS Associated Training Services *Tami Saleska*. We are approved through the VA for Voc. Rehab (VR&E) along with GI Bill for Veterans. We train in heavy equipment, crane operations and Class A CDL.



**FREE MEAL**  
for Military-Connected People

**MENU** Pulled Pork Sandwich  
Potato Salad • Coleslaw  
Beans • Water/Drinks

Service Members, Veterans and their Families have the chance to receive up to **\$250 in Grocery Gift Cards**

Eliminating Food Insecurity among Veteran and Military Families living in rural South Dakota.

For Additional Info Contact  
**Troy Foster,**  
 Post Commander  
 (605) 237-8618  
**Chris Hicks, VSO**  
 (605) 698-7376  
**Tammy Chase**  
 Auxiliary President  
 (605) 742-4179

### IMPORTANT VA INFO ON EXPANDING HEALTHCARE

VA has announced that they are expanding healthcare eligibility to all veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, or any other combat zone after 9/11/2001. Originally, the PACT Act called for a phased in approach, but at the direction of President Biden, VA has instead opened this expanded eligibility to VA Healthcare effective March 5, 2024.

Please encourage any eligible veterans to enroll in VA healthcare; they can do so online at <https://www.va.gov/health-care/apply/application/introduction>, by phone at 877-222-8387, or by visiting a local VA medical facility.



# **FAREWAY®**

## **MEAT & GROCERY**

**From May 6 - 18, "Round Up"  
your purchase at these stores  
and Fareway will donate it to  
Midwest Honor Flight!**



**MIDWEST  
HONOR FLIGHT**

**MINNESOTA STORE:**

228 Luverne

099 Worthington

**SOUTH DAKOTA STORES:**

178 Harrisburg

164 Sioux Falls

213 Sioux Falls

192 Tea

**IOWA STORES:**

014 Sergeant Bluff

019 Sioux City

022 Sioux City

829 Sioux City

912 Sioux Center

719 Le Mars

058 Orange City

788 Spencer

502 Cherokee

021 Sheldon



# UPCOMING EVENTS

- Apr 26-27—DAV State Convention—Deadwood Lodge
- Apr 27—Operation Chow Line—Vern Eide Marine—(4501 E. Arrowhead Pkwy)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—1:00 pm (CT)
- May 6-18—Fareway Round Up Campaign at participating stores
- May 7—Corson County What's Brewing—Pavilion—(Main and First Ave)—McIntosh—10:00 am (MT)
- May 7—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 18—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Ave)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
- May 9—Gregory County What's Brewing—American Legion Post 6—(223 Main Street)—Gregory—5:00 pm (CT)
- May 13—Operation Chow Line—Rosalle's Restaurant—(9 8th Avenue E)—Sisseton—2:00—7:00 pm (CT)
- May 16—Black Hills National Cemetery Carry the Load Program—Sturgis—3:00 pm (MT)
- May 21—Yankton County What's Brewing—VFW Post 791—(209 Cedar St)—Yankton—10:00 am (CT)
- May 21—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 19—Welcome Home Ceremony—Convention Center—(1201 N. West Ave)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
- May 27—Sioux Area Veterans Council Memorial Day—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
- May 27—SDDVA Memorial Day Program—SD Veterans Cemetery—12:00 noon (CT)
- Jun 1—Rich Schild Memorial Poker Run—Keg—Tabor—1:00 pm (CT)
- Jun 5—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 20—Welcome Home Ceremony—Convention Center—(1201 N. West Ave)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
- Jun 7—8—VFW State Conference—Holiday Inn—Spearfish
- Jun 14—Midwest Honor Flight Day of Sweetness—Chick-fil-A—(4005 W. 41st St)—Sioux Falls—7:00 am —10:00 pm (CT)
- Jun 20—23—American Legion State Conference—Pierre
- Jun 30—Midwest Honor Flight Honor Ride—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls—Registration—1:00 pm/Ride Begins at 2:30 pm (CT)
- Jul 15—6th Annual Tee it up for the Troops Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—Arrowhead Country Club—(3675 Sheridan Lake Road)—Rapid City—7:15 am (MT)
- Jul 17—SD Veterans Council Meeting—VFW Post 17—(802 S. Main St)—Aberdeen
- Aug 1—2—South Dakota Suicide Prevention Conference—Convention Center—(1201 N. West Ave)—Sioux Falls
- Aug 21—SD Veterans Council Meeting—VFW Post 791—(209 S. Cedar)—Yankton
- Aug 26—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th St)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—8:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 29—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair—Northwest Energy Freedom Stage—Huron
- Aug 29—Sep 2—SD State Fair—Huron
- Sep 3—5—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls
- Sep 18—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Rapid City
- Oct 12—Midwest Honor Flight Third Annual Elvis Night—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls
- Oct 16—SD Veterans Council Meeting—American Legion Post—(1229 Western Ave)—Brookings

(Continued)

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Nov 9—Fifth Annual Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair We’ve Got Your Six—Sturgis Community Center—(1401 Lazelle Street)—Sturgis—11:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)

Nov 9—Third Annual Day County Veterans Banquet—Webster Armory—5:00 pm (CT)

Nov 18—Wreaths Across America Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th St)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—8:00 pm (CT)

Nov 20—SD Veterans Council Meeting—DAV—(1519 W. 51st St)—Sioux Falls

Nov 20—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Sioux Falls

Nov 21—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Watertown

Nov 22—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Rapid City

Nov 23—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Pierre

Dec 3—Governor’s Budget Address—1:00 pm

Dec 14—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

## 2025 Events

Jan 14—Governor’s State of the State Address—1:00 pm

Jan 14—Legislative Session starts

Jan 15—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Pierre

Feb 14—16—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Oacoma

Jun 12—15—VFW State Convention—Ramkota—Pierre

Jun 19—22—American Legion State Conference—Huron

Dec 13—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military <https://military.sd.gov/>

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

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