



South Dakota Department of the Military
 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



VETERANS COMMISSION MEETS AND SELECTS NEW LEADERSHIP

The South Dakota Veterans Commission met earlier this week in Pierre. Most of their meeting centered around veterans preference.

Commissioners reviewed information they had obtained from 49 other states regarding their veterans preference practices and laws. The Commission heard reports from representatives from the South Dakota Municipal



League, the South Dakota Association of County Officials and Commissioners, the State Bureau of Human Relations and the School Administrators of South Dakota. Their reports included how veterans preference is utilized within their network as well as suggestive changes for existing statutes. The theme throughout the presentation

and the review was education and awareness. The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be developing messages for the state, counties, municipalities and schools to use to educate their respective network on veterans preference best practices.

Commissioners also discussed the challenges veterans are facing with the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act.

Jim Ross was elected chairman and Helen Parr was elected vice chairman.



Inside this issue:

Support for Veteran's Care Givers	2
OJT and Apprenticeship Programs	3
Message from Senator Rounds	4
Upcoming Events	5

CAREGIVERS SUPPORT PROGRAM

Throughout the month of November, VA's Caregiver Support Program celebrates National Family Caregivers Month to recognize the crucial role that caregivers play in helping Veterans recover from injury and illness. Family caregivers are partners in the care of Veterans by providing compassionate, home-based care for our Nation's heroes. November is a time to highlight and appreciate these generous and caring individuals.

At the VA Black Hills Health Care System, over 200 caregivers take part in the Caregiver Support Program. The program's mission is to promote the health and well-being of family caregivers through education, and the provision of resources, support, and services. VA offers numerous programs such as in-home care, adult day health care, respite, and Home Based Primary Care. Caregivers are provided online and telephone support programs, peer mentoring, and local caregiver support groups.

On Monday, November 23rd from 12:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. the public is invited to an Open House to learn more about the role of caregivers and the resources available.

The Open House will take place at the Hot Springs VA Medical Center, Building 1, in the Rotunda. During that time, local artist Aaron Percy with About this Life, Inc. will create a mural that reflects the true commitment and dedication

of caregivers. The public is invited to view Percy's process as the mural is created in the Domiciliary Auditorium, Hot Springs VA Medical Center. The completed mural will be presented at 5:30 p.m.

For information on VA's Caregiver Support Program, go to <http://www.caregiver.va.gov>, call VA's toll-free Caregiver Support Line at 1-855-260-3274, or contact Amber Heinert, VA BHHCS Caregiver Support Coordinator at 1-605-745-2000 extension 2574.

A Time of Thanks and Appreciation
Honoring those who care for our Nation's Heroes

Monday, November 23, 2015

12:00 pm - 6:00 pm Open House at the Hot Springs VA Medical Center Rotunda, Bldg 1
12:00 pm - 5:30 pm A mural will be created by artist Aaron Percy with About this Life, Inc

All are welcome and encouraged to come and go throughout the day to observe the process and creation of the mural. **The official presentation will be at 5:30 pm in the Hot Springs Domiciliary Auditorium**

Black Hills Health Care System
Department of Veterans Affairs

VA Caregiver Support

HOPE for Heroes
RESTRICTED BY 38 USC 5622(a)(1)
www.hopeforheroes.org

MESSAGE FROM SENATOR ROUNDS — WE THANK OUR VETERANS, NOW LET'S IMPROVE THEIR CARE

On November 11, South Dakotans across the state once again gathered in auditoriums, gymnasiums, Legion halls and at memorials to recognize the service and sacrifices of our veterans. Since statehood, generations of South Dakotans have answered the call to serve in times of war, peace and uncertainty around the world. With one of the highest rates of military membership per capita in the nation, almost all of us know a loved one who served in the military.

As a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, working with veterans, veteran service organizations and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to make certain the men and women who fought to defend our country receive the care they've been promised has been a top priority.

Just before Veterans Day, I joined Sens. Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.), Mark Warner (D-Va.) and Thom Tillis (R-N.C.), to introduce bipartisan legislation to help improve staffing at VA health centers. The *Veterans Healthcare Staffing Improvement Act* would allow veterans to receive health care closer to home by removing bureaucratic barriers for their providers. At many VA health centers around the country, veterans are forced wait weeks – sometimes even months – just to get an appointment. This is unacceptable.

Our bill aims to make it easier for military doctors and other health care professionals to transfer directly into the VA system after serving in the armed forces. It also allows nurse practitioners and physician assistants to provide a wider range of services to help address health provider shortages at VA facilities across the nation. This is a similar strategy being implemented by our state's private health-care systems and is important for providing greater access to care at one of the many community-based outpatient clinics in our region. The main goal is to get our veterans the health care they deserve in an efficient and effective manner.

I regularly hear from South Dakota veterans about the VA. While I'm pleased to hear that many are satisfied with the care they receive, improvements are still needed. The Veterans Choice Program is a prime example. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is a complex organization challenged by its size, scope of services, unique patient population, congressionally mandated funding and governance.

In 2014, the *Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act* was passed and signed into law in an attempt to get veterans off long waitlists and into their doctor's office. The law's intent was to provide better care and greater flexibility, but the VA's implementation has missed the mark. The primary focus must be to get veterans quality care as soon as possible, avoiding the need to jump through hoops or fill out excessive paperwork. Veterans have enough on their plate and shouldn't have to worry if they will be able to see a doctor when they are sick. We will continue to work to fix the Choice Act and improve veteran care.

We will continue to work diligently to provide greater access to care closer to home for our veterans, as well as better care throughout the entire VA system. After all, one of the most important things we can do to honor our veterans is to keep the promises which we make to them. They deserve this much from their country.



Upcoming Events

Nov. 21—Veterans Council Leg. Round Table—Rapid City (VFW Post 1273—420 Main Street) 10 am (MT)
 Dec. 1—SDDVA Mini Conference—Rapid City TREA—1981 Centre Street—10:00 am (MT)
 Dec. 2—SDDVA Mini Conference—Pierre—American Legion Post 8 —520 W. Pierre Street (CT)
 Dec. 3—SDDVA Mini Conference—Brookings—American Legion Post 74—1229 Western Avenue (CT)
 Dec. 7 Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony—Capitol Lake—Pierre—11:00 am (CT)
 Dec. 8— Governor’s Budget Address—Pierre

2016

Jan. 4—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)
 Jan. 12—SD Legislative Session Opens—Pierre
 Jan. 14—Veterans Legislative Breakfast—Pierre
 Jan. 27-28-State Tribal Relations Days—Pierre
 Feb. 12-14—American Legion Mid Winter Conference—Huron Crossroads
 Apr. 4—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)
 April 15-17—DAV Convention—Rapid City
 Jun. 16-19—American Legion State Convention—Ramkota—Watertown
 Jul. 11—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)
 Oct. 3—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)

Happy Thanks-
giving to all within
our Veteran Net-
work.

SDDVA and
SDDOM offices will
be closed Thursday
and Friday, Novem-
ber 26-27.



Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer
 South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>
 South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <http://vetaffairs.sd.gov>
 Soldiers and Sailors Building - 425 E Capitol Avenue
 Pierre, SD 57501
 Phone: 605-773-8242
 E-mail address: audry.ricketts@state.sd.us

