



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



VA ANNOUNCES DEPARTURE OF ACTING UNDER SECRETARY FOR BENEFITS DANNY PUMMILL

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has announced the departure of Danny G.I. Pummill from his post as Acting Under Secretary for Benefits at the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).

Mr. Pummill has served as the Acting Under Secretary since October 19, 2015. Mr. Pummill had previously planned to retire by the end of 2015, but upon the departure of previous Under Secretary for Benefits Allison Hickey, he remained as head of the administration at the request of Secretary Robert A. McDonald. His continuing service helped ensure the critical continuity required to complete VBA's transformation, and help expand the MyVA effort at the administration level.

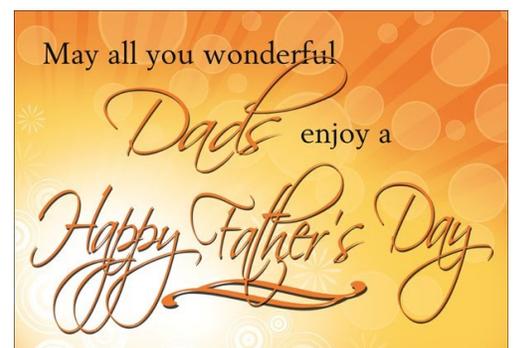
Mr. Pummill began his tenure at VBA in 2010 as the Deputy Director for Policy and Procedures for the agency's compensation service. Two years later, he became Director of the VBA/ Department of Defense Program Office, and in 2013, he was appointed Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits. Prior to coming to VBA, he served in the Army for 33 years as both an enlisted soldier and an officer and then continued with the Department of the Army as a civilian employee for five years.



Acting Principal Deputy Under Secretary Thomas Murphy will be appointed as Principal Deputy Under Secretary for Benefits and assume the role of Acting Under Secretary for Benefits. Mr. Murphy joined VBA in 2009 as the Director of the San Juan Regional Office in Puerto Rico. Prior to becoming Acting Principal Deputy Under Secretary, he served as Director of compensation service.

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MESSAGE FROM SECRETARY ZIMMERMAN

As I walked through the cemeteries this past Memorial Day, I couldn't help but stop at the graves of many of our heroes and wonder what their dash would have been. The "Dash," a poem written by Linda Ellis, references the dates on the tombstone from beginning.....to the end. The dash represents all the time they spent alive on earth.

We all know that the dash for our veterans buried in those cemeteries was shortened because of the ultimate sacrifice they made. That shortened dash also impacted the lives of their families. So the next time you visit the graves of our heroes, remember that shortened dash is there because those young heroes gave their lives to ensure our freedom. No award, medal, or title would be enough to thank them for the service they rendered. They embodied the fighting spirit, courage, the determination and the willingness to put it all on the line for us and for this Nation.

Our young men and women that serve must know that their sacrifice is appreciated and their courage is honored. They must know that there are resources to help them when they return. As such, Gov. Dugaard will be proclaiming June 27, 2016, as "Post-Traumatic Stress Injury Awareness Day," in South Dakota.

This Awareness Day is a great opportunity to reflect on the causes, symptoms and treatment of post-traumatic stress injuries. Awareness of PTSI can be divided into three themes - learn, connect and share. Take the mystery out of PTSI by learning more about the invisible wounds and the treatments that are available. Reach out to someone and give support. Help spread the word. Working together we can make a difference.

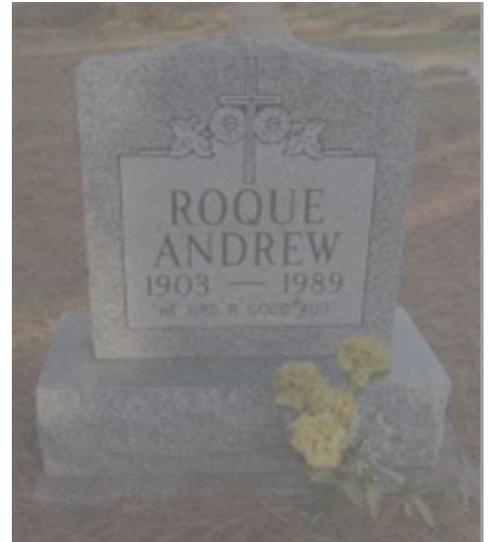
In addition, veterans in South Dakota will have access to some improved benefits beginning July 1 thanks to the passage of House Bills 1056 and 1163 and Senate Bill 71 during the 2016 legislative session:

- Veteran's preference has been changed to ensure that all veterans applying for a job with state government, the municipalities, the schools or the counties are guaranteed an interview.
- Time restrictions have been removed from the free tuition benefits for certain veterans residing in South Dakota.
- Revised provisions regarding the issuance of small game and fishing licenses

I encourage veterans to contact their local county or tribal veterans service officers to learn more about these new changes in laws impacting veterans.

In closing, let us always remember the men and women who serve and have served our Nation in uniform. Their sacrifices are immeasurable.

Larry Zimmerman, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs



VA PARTNERS WITH KABOOM TO SUPPORT VETERAN FAMILIES

Sometimes play is the best medicine. The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is announcing a partnership with the national non-profit organization KaBOOM! to make play more accessible to children visiting VA Medical Centers and VA Fisher Houses. KaBOOM! is one of a number of partnerships formed under the MyVA initiative, the largest transformation in VA's history, which focuses squarely on the needs of veterans through customer service and strong community partnerships.



Under the agreement, KaBOOM! will provide their signature Imagination Playground™ and Rigamajigs to VA locations across the nation. These portable, scalable play systems create safe, fun-filled environments for children to play in.

KaBOOM! will work with VA to select sites across the country that have the greatest need for play spaces. VA medical centers and VA Fisher Houses, which are built by Fisher House Foundation to provide temporary accommodations for families of veterans receiving treatment at a VA medical center or military hospital, have been identified as ideal locations for these play environments.

"When veterans are dealing with a serious illness or injury, it can be incredibly stressful for their families, especially those with young children," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Robert A. McDonald. "Our partnership with KaBOOM! will enable us to use the simple art of play to help keep the children and families of Veterans happy and healthy. These types of partnerships are a great way for the VA to provide support for families – an important component of taking care of Veterans."

CarMax is the KaBOOM! corporate sponsor for this playground project. As a part of its ongoing multi-million dollar commitment to KaBOOM!, CarMax will build four playgrounds and provide 30 grants for Imagination Playgrounds™ and Rigamajigs to select VA medical centers, Fisher Houses and other organizations that serve veterans and military families. It is expected that through this project, VA, KaBOOM! and CarMax will help reach 85,000 children over the next three years. The first donations were made to facilities located in Gainesville, Florida, and Salt Lake City, Utah.



"We are grateful to our Armed Forces who inspire us with their dedication to protecting our country," said James Siegal, CEO of KaBOOM! "Through our partnership VA, together we are honoring and showing commitment to veterans and military families by encouraging play, particularly for kids who need it most. Creating play spaces in Fisher Houses and VA facilities will help ensure kids can experience balanced and active play so they can thrive and enjoy the childhood they deserve."

Since 1996, KaBOOM! has collaborated with its corporate partners to build, open or improve nearly 16,300 playgrounds, engaged more than one million volunteers, and served 8.1 million children.

For more information about VA partnerships, visit: [MyVA Strategic Partnerships](#).

For more information about KaBOOM!, visit: <http://kaboom.org/rigamajig>

VA TO HOLD TOWN HALL MEETING

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Dakotas Regional Office and Sioux Falls Health Care System will host a town hall for veterans, family members, Veterans Service Organization representatives, and the public to provide feedback and recommendations about VA health care and benefits.

The town hall will be held Tuesday, June 21, at 5:00 pm and will be held at the DAV Headquarters in Sioux Falls (1519 W. 51st Street).

The town hall affords VA leadership to hear feedback, thoughts, and concerns from veterans and to answer questions about VA benefits and VA health care.

A benefits clinic will also take place from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. VA representatives will be available to receive veterans' claims for compensation benefits and can answer questions about compensation benefits.



ROUNDS AND COLLEAGUES REQUEST VA UPDATE ON PROGRESS TO IMPROVE ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

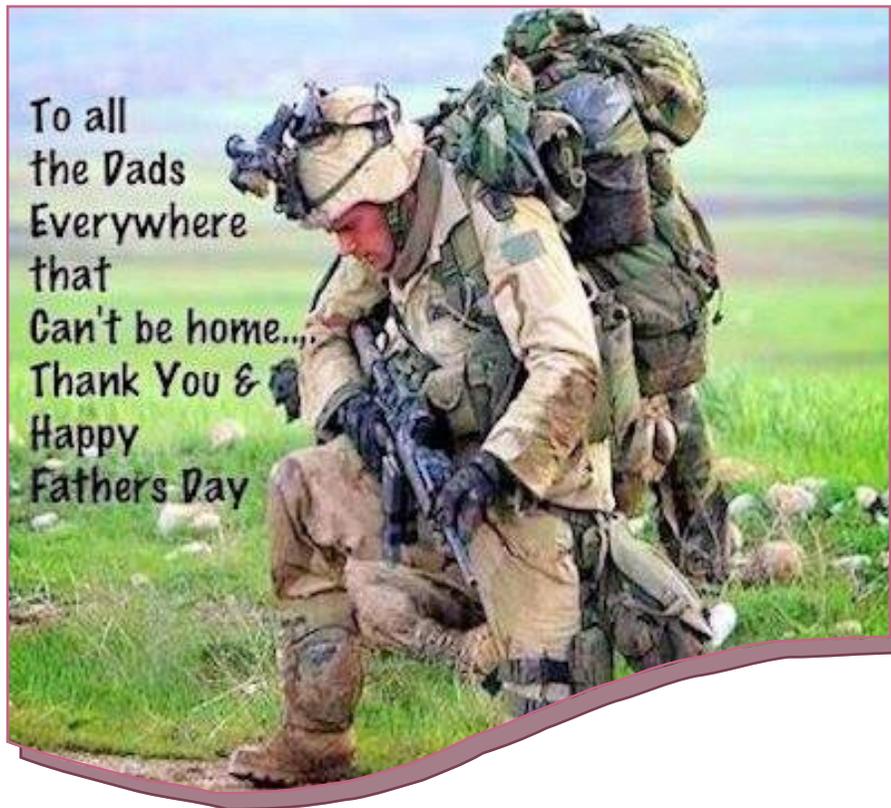
U.S. Senator Mike Rounds (R-S.D.), a member of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, joined 10 of his Senate colleagues in writing a letter raising concerns about veterans' timely access to quality health care at the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The letter requests the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) promptly issue a comprehensive scheduling directive to address immediate wait times and healthcare access issues raised in a Government Accountability Office (GAO) report more than one year ago. In that report, the VHA was listed as a "High-Risk" federal agency.

"More than a year has passed since the GAO identified VHA as vulnerable to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement, and in need of transformation, based on five serious, long-standing and well documented deficiencies," the senators wrote. "As a result of these deficiencies, VHA was included on GAO's list of "High-Risk" federal agencies. This letter sets out the three critical steps you must take to restore our confidence that VHA can resolve the chronic risks identified for veterans' access to quality VA health care."

The letter was led by Veterans' Affairs Committee Chairman Johnny Isakson (R-Ga.) and Ranking Member Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.), and signed by U.S. Sens. Mike Rounds (R-S.D.), Jerry Moran (R-Kan.), Patty Murray (D-Wash.), John Boozman (R-Ark.), Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio), Bill Cassidy (R-La.), Jon Tester (D-Mont.), Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) and Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.).

Upcoming Events

- Jun. 16-19—American Legion State Convention—Ramkota—Watertown
- Jun. 21—VA Healthcare and VA Benefits Town Hall Meeting—DAV - Sioux Falls—5:00 pm (CT)
- Jun. 29—Black Hills Veterans Job Fair—Central States Fair Grounds (915 Centre Street) - 11:00 am (MT)
- Jul. 1—Buffalo Chip Annual Flag Raising Ceremony—West Gate Entrance off Ft. Meade Way—6:00 pm (MT)
- Jul. 11—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)
- Jul. 13—SD Veterans Council—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
- Jul. 23-24—Sioux Falls Air Show
- Aug. 22-25—SDDVA Annual Benefits School—Pierre Ramkota
- Oct. 3—BHNC Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)



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