



South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs
Soldiers and Sailors Building
425 E. Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501
Phone: 605-773-8242 Fax: 605-773-5380
<http://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

For more information, contact: Audry Ricketts (South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs) at 605-773-8242 or audry.ricketts@state.sd.us

SDDVA Secretary Whitlock's May Column – A Resting Place for Heroes

It's a few years into the future and as I drive past a grand entry that reads "South Dakota Veterans Cemetery" American flags line the drive as I pull into the cortège lane and exit my vehicle. I survey the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery as we prepare for the first internment of a hero who has opted to spend eternity here at this place of honor.

Looking back on this project I'm reminded how the work of many was vital to seeing this special resting place come to reality. Many people believe the discussions about a state veterans cemetery are only about three years old, which in fact, is not the case. Advocates for a state veterans cemetery will remind you that this has been an ongoing passionate push for over a decade.

Prior to the 2018 Legislative Session, members of the South Dakota Veterans Council began working to determine if a suitable piece of property could be obtained for establishing a state veterans cemetery. Working with the City of Sioux Falls, the South Dakota Veterans Council identified approximately 60 acres of property just north of the I-90 and I-229 Interchange that would be suitable for establishing a resting place for our heroes and their spouses.

During the 2018 Legislative Session Senate Bill 91 unanimously passed the House and Senate. This legislation instructed the State Department of Veterans Affairs to begin the application process through the National Cemetery Administration to obtain a grant to establish a state veterans cemetery. Our Department submitted a pre-application for this purpose in April 2018, and was notified in October 2018 that South Dakota was selected for a grant opportunity to establish a state veterans cemetery.

Concurrently, a team comprised of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of State Engineering, Bureau of Finance Management, Bureau of Administration, Stockwell Engineers, Journey Construction and the National Cemetery Administration was formed and tasked with all aspects of the design and establishment of your state veterans cemetery.

The other piece of Senate Bill 91 was the establishment of an endowment fund to cover the expense for the on-going operations of the state veterans cemetery. The South Dakota Veterans Council, and their partners, are working diligently to raise over three million dollars. You can learn more about the foundation at: <https://sdcommunityfoundation.org/for-advisors/existing-funds/south-dakota-state-veterans-cemetery-fund/>.

Eligibility for burial at our state veterans cemetery will be consistent with the eligibility criteria set forth by the National Cemetery Administration as it relates to veteran burials at Federal National Veterans' Cemeteries.

Fast forward to now, and the state veterans cemetery design is over 95 percent complete and could be sent for bid soon. I do not want to be dismissive of the amount of work that every entity, and individual, involved has done during this time. This worthy project has required countless hours of attention from everyone involved.

Most importantly, the Department wishes to thank each individual and entity that has had a hand in seeing this project through. There is much work to come, but we stand ready to accomplish our goals in seeing this project to completion and beyond.

Watch for updates on the cemetery on our webpage: <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov>.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs