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**SDDVA Secretary Whitlock's June Column – Taking Care of Our Heroes**

Over the past four months we, as a nation, have been adjusting and trying to discover our new “norm.” The Coronavirus pandemic changed our lives in so many ways and forced us to meet challenges head-on and be creative and discover new potentials. I’m proud to say that our team at the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs stayed the course and continued our day-to-day operations in assisting our veterans and their families.

Veterans needs differ from one era to the next and it is important that we identify their needs and find solutions to enhance their lives. Perhaps one of the greatest challenges they face is the unseen injury - Post Traumatic Stress Injury (PTSI). Our country has been working to solve this injury since the Civil War. Whether diagnosed as Da Costas Syndrome, shell shock, battle fatigue, post-Vietnam Syndrome or PTSI, they all are related to combat exposure and we owe it to our troops to assist them as they and their families face this challenge.

Our young men and women that serve must know that their sacrifice is appreciated, their courage is honored, and we are here to help them transition back to civilian life. They must know that there are resources to help them when they return. As such, Governor Noem will be proclaiming June 27, 2020, 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 PTSI. Awareness can be divided into three themes - learn, connect, and share. Help us take the mystery out of PTSI by learning more about the invisible wounds and the resources that are available. Everyone can help.

There are many resources available to help veterans, including: one-to-one mental health assessment and testing, one-to-one therapy for both the veteran and their family, group therapy, medication, vet centers, and telehealth. Veterans who have questions or concerns regarding PTSI are encouraged to reach out to their local county or tribal veterans service officer or our office 605-773-3269.

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Let us never forget the brave spirit of those who founded the United States of America and the men and women who continue to ensure our freedom. They embodied the fighting spirit, courage, the determination and the willingness to put it all on the line for us and for this Nation.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs