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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

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**SDDVA Secretary Whitlock's February Column – Connecting with our Veterans!**

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs mission is to “provide comprehensive care and quality service to veterans and their families, regarding health care, education, disability benefits, long-term care, and burial honors by providing professional customer service and care.” We carry out our mission not just as an expression of gratitude to those who have served, but also for the sake of our South Dakota communities and businesses. After all, our veterans are proven, hardworking, and dedicated people – assets to their communities, the workforce, and countless organizations. The contributions of our South Dakota heroes allow our South Dakota communities to thrive.

It is important that we help our veterans move ahead, live life to the fullest, reintegrate into their communities and have access to high quality benefits and services in a timely, consistent, and equitable manner. It is important that we help them establish a “new normal” in family relationships, wellness, and financial stability.

As policies, procedures, and laws change, so do the veterans we serve. The World War II, Korean, and Vietnam Veterans are of retirement age and need assistance applying for pension and medical benefits. At the other end of the spectrum, we have the Post-and-Pre-9-11 Veterans who have different issues ranging from educational benefits, OJT programs and home loans.

Our state veterans service officers and our county and tribal veterans service officers are experts in helping veterans navigate the complex system of federal, state, and local benefits and resources available to veterans and their families. Encourage your veteran to contact the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs (605.333.6869) or their local county or tribal veterans service officer.

Help us be as responsive to our youngest veterans as we are to our oldest veterans. Help us to return functionality to the men and women wounded in service. Help us guide our veterans to the resources that can help them and their families. As our state's veteran population and their needs continue to change and evolve, so will our team of advocates and our delivery of service.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary  
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs