SDDVA Secretary Whitlock’s August Column – Serving Those Who Served

One of my favorite Abraham Lincoln quotes is “Honor to the soldier, and sailor everywhere, who bravely bears his country’s cause. Honor, also, to the citizen who cares for his brother in the field and serves, as he best can, the same cause.”

Our veterans have shouldered the burden of our defense. They have displayed extraordinary strength and resilience in the face of adversity to protect the freedoms we, as Americans, enjoy every day.

When our men and women return home after their tour of duty, we have the opportunity to show our gratitude by serving them. They must know that there are resources to help them. Veterans service officers provide a service, at no cost, to assist veterans in applying for benefits.

There has been a lot in the news lately about the Camp Lejeune lawsuit. We encourage all veterans to work with an accredited service officer when determining how to proceed with claims based upon exposure to hazards at Camp Lejeune. A final determination has not been made regarding lawsuits related to the Camp Lejeune Water Act and how this will impact veterans’ abilities to receive care at the VA and receive payments for disabilities related to these toxic exposures.

Additionally, the Honoring our Pact Act of 2022 expands VA compensation and healthcare benefits to veterans exposed to Agent Orange, burn pits, and other toxic exposures.

I’m proud of the resources that the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs and our partners; the county and tribal veterans service officers, provide at no cost.

This team of experts have worn the boots, walked the trenches, conducted maneuvers, commanded troops, sustained missions, and protected our freedoms. They are veterans that have borne the battle and are committed to ensure that our heroes receive the highest quality of services possible. Again, there is no charge for the services they provide our veterans in obtaining their benefits.

To reach our SDDVA team, please call 605.333.6869. To locate a county or tribal veterans service officer, please visit: https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/veteransserviceofficers/locatevso.aspx.

The SDDVA and our partners put our veterans first, serving those who have given so much to this nation. We consider it an honor and a privilege and are committed to assisting our veterans with their questions on the Pact Act and Camp Lejeune.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs