Earlier this month, veterans gathered in Pierre for the dedication and unveiling of the POW/MIA chair of honor. The chair, donated by Rolling Thunder Inc. Chapter 2 of Brookings, is located on the west wing of the second floor at the South Dakota Capitol.

Special thanks to Bob Foster and the members of Rolling Thunder Inc. Chapter 2, Governor Kristi Noem, the South Dakota Bureau of Administration, and the members of the Capitol Complex Restoration and Beautification Commission for their support of this display.

America's Prisoners of War fought fiercely and served with honor and distinction under the worst conditions. They demonstrated personal courage, selflessness, and unflagging loyalty to their country. Theirs is a quiet courage based on hope and trust that saw them through the most brutal and depressing of all military experiences. Whether their imprisonment lasted a few weeks or many years, during that trying time there was no end in sight, only their personal will to go on.

To lose your freedom while fighting for the freedom of others is a personal irony that has deep emotional impact. We who have not experienced that loss can't comprehend it on a personal level, but we can make it meaningful for every citizen by honoring those who have given their freedom for the security of our nation. In their service to our country, former prisoners of war have sacrificed mightily to maintain the promise of liberty that we hold dear.

They served with dignity and honor under the worst of human conditions – starvation, isolation, torture, and the ever-present threat of death. Yet even during their darkest hour, they demonstrated remarkable personal courage and unwavering devotion to family and country. Their strength is a testament to American character.

To the thousands of military families tormented by uncertainty due to the loss of loved ones whose whereabouts remain unknown, we want you to know that we will never forget their courage; nor the sacrifices they made so that we can enjoy the freedoms we embrace today as Americans.

Greg Whitlock, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs