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SDDVA Secretary Schneider's April Column – "Serving Those Who Served: Schneider Looks Forward to Connecting with all Veterans"

I am honored to have begun my tenure as Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs on March 5th. One of my foremost objectives is to visit each county veterans service office and all veteran's service organizations across our state, with the goal of strengthening our partnerships with veterans, local communities, and veteran organizations. During my first month in this role, I continue to be deeply inspired by the pride, strength, and resilience of our veterans and their families. South Dakota's military heritage is firmly rooted in the enduring foundation built by our veterans and their loved ones, and I am both proud and humbled to serve as your Secretary.

In April, we are preparing for the launch of our "What's Brewing" events across South Dakota. While the specific dates are still being finalized, they will be publicized as soon as they are confirmed. These events provide an invaluable opportunity to strengthen our network, engage in meaningful dialogue, seek answers, and enhance the services we provide. Additionally, these gatherings offer a chance to share stories, enjoy camaraderie, and engage in friendly banter, as is characteristic of the bonds shared by our brothers and sisters in arms. These events hold significant importance for the SDDVA staff, as they allow us to engage directly with veterans and gain insight into their needs. I encourage all veterans to attend these events whenever possible.

April also marks the "Month of the Military Child." Many of us who served in the military left behind families, including children, who experienced their own form of separation as we went off to training or into combat. This month, I urge you to take a moment to connect with your children and grandchildren. It is easy to become absorbed in the busyness of life, but it is essential to recognize the impact our deployments had on our families. Our children, too, faced their own kind of deployment, and their sacrifices should not be overlooked. Take time to engage with them, share your experiences, and continue to nurture those priceless family bonds.

I would also like to extend my warmest wishes to all Navy Chiefs on the occasion of the 132nd anniversary of the Navy Chief's birthday. Yes, we are a seasoned group, affectionately known as "Goats," and we may be salty, but much like all South Dakota veterans, we are deeply proud of our service. My charge for the day is this: "Passion is a powerful tool; yield that power carefully, for it carries the weight of influence."

On April 5th, we observed Gold Star Spouses Day, a day to honor the spouses who have lost their loved ones in service to our country. This observance, which dates back to the early 20th century, began with a lapel button and later became officially recognized through a Senate resolution. Each year, we pause on this day to express our deepest gratitude and respect for the sacrifices made by Gold Star families.

Finally, I would like to extend heartfelt birthday wishes to both the Army Reserve and the Air Force Reserve. Your continued dedication to service is integral to the strength of our state and our nation. Your commitment ensures that South Dakota remains a proud and resilient community of veterans, and we are profoundly grateful for your service.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your Secretary. It is an honor I do not take lightly, and I look forward to continuing to work alongside you to ensure that South Dakota remains a place where veterans and their families are respected, supported, and honored.

Jeremiah J. Schneider, Secretary
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs