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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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SDDVA SECRETARY SCHNEIDER'S OCTOBER COLUMN –THE COURAGE TO REMEMBER

As autumn steadily paints South Dakota's prairies in gold and russet, October arrives as a time of both transition and quiet strength. It is fitting that this month, marked by harvest and change, offers us a chance to reflect on the indomitable spirit of South Dakota's veterans, whose service and sacrifice have cultivated the freedoms we celebrate.

Every day, in communities large and small, the legacy of our military men and women flourishes in stories quietly passed along at kitchen tables, in handshakes at local posts, and in the respectful silence when flags lower at sunset. While no single month can encompass the gratitude owed to those who have served, October is especially rich with military anniversaries — reminders of moments when courage shaped the course of our history.

Important Military Dates in October:

- October 3: Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication – SGT Dirk Abbas
Britton Event Center, 1203 3rd Street, Britton 2:00 pm (CT)
- October 7: Midwest Honor Flight Mission 28;
- October 8: Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication – PVT Leroy Goosen
Sully Buttes High School, 500 S. 8th Street, Onida, 1:45 pm (CT);
- October 13: U.S. Navy Birthday - on this day in 1775, the United States Navy was established, marking the beginning of centuries of maritime protection and heroic service. For South Dakotans who have donned Navy blue — from sailors on distant seas to officers at home — this birthday is a tribute to their legacy of duty and vigilance;
- October 18: U.S. Navy Ball
Holiday Inn Sioux Falls-City Centre, 100 West 8th St, Sioux Falls, 5:00 pm (CT);
- October 26: National Day of the Deployed, which honors those currently serving abroad. Every service member overseas is a son, daughter, spouse, or friend to someone back home. This day recognizes their sacrifice — and the quiet strength of loved ones awaiting their return;
- October 27: Navy Day, which celebrates all who have served in the Navy's ranks, past and present; and
- Other notable remembrances include anniversaries such as the Afghanistan War and the Grenada Campaign, moments that have shaped global history and involved countless South Dakota families.

In South Dakota, the Department of Veterans Affairs works year-round to ensure that sacrifice is more than memory — it is woven into the fabric of our communities. From

Fallen Hero Bridge Dedications to veterans' outreach, local history is reinforced with every handshake, every gathering, and every story told.

The real power of these commemorative dates lies not only in remembrance but in the inspiration they kindle. South Dakota's veterans have taught us the resilience of overcoming adversity, the strength that comes from unity, and the hope that emerges during hardship. Their stories — sometimes quiet, sometimes astonishing — offer lessons for all: that service means putting others before self, and that even in darkness, one can become a beacon of light.

To veterans from every branch and era, South Dakota salutes you not only this October, but every day. Your courage is our inheritance, your sacrifice our solemn charge. And to those currently deployed, know this: here in South Dakota, you are never far from our hearts or our prayers. The path you walk — whether half a world away or on Main Street, Pierre — is paved with gratitude and hope.

Consider these simple ways to celebrate October's military milestones:

- Attend a local veteran's event or bridge dedication;
- Share a veteran's story within your family or classroom;
- Reach out to a neighbor who has served — even a simple "thank you" never goes unnoticed;
- Raise the flag on your home or business in observance of Navy Birthday or Navy Day.
- Volunteer or donate to veteran service organizations; or
- Observe a moment of silence on the National Day of the Deployed.

As Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, it is my honor and obligation to ensure that every veteran's story is told, respected, and passed forward. Let this October inspire consideration, conversation, and, above all, remembrance. Let gratitude guide us, as surely as duty once guided those who answered the nation's call.

From prairie towns to bustling cities, may South Dakota stand always as a place where the courage and sacrifice of veterans are cherished — in October and throughout all seasons of freedom.

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