



# NEWSLETTER

**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS**  
**SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY**



## MEMORIAL DAY 2024

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Greg Whitlock was the keynote speaker for Memorial Day programs at the Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield and American Legion Post 209 in Raymond.

SDDVA Field Service Officer Kevin Swanson participated in the veterans service organizations Memorial Day program in Pierre.

SDDVA Physical Plant Manager Ton Inman and Activities Director Laura Inman were instrumental in hosting a Memorial Day program at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home. Special thanks to all that assisted or performed in this great program. A special thank you to American Legion Riders Post 71 for their assistance in maintaining the Home's cemetery and the donation of the new flag pole for the cemetery.



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# 4TH ANNUAL MEMORIAL DAY AT STATE CEMETERY

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs held our fourth annual Memorial Day program at the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery with over 500 guests joining us.

This year's program opened with the raising of the flag. On Memorial Day, the American flag is flown at half-staff from sunrise until noon only, then raised briskly to the top of the staff until sunset. The first half of the day honors those who lost their lives while serving their country; the second half of the day represents American courage.



Music was provided by Sunny Radio, the El Riad Shrine Fife and Drum Corps, and students from the Sioux Falls Lincoln High School Band.

American Legion Post 15 from Sioux Falls served as the Honor Guard for the entire ceremony.



Sharing heartfelt messages with attendees were: SDDVA Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard, Cemetery Director Erin Brown, Pastor Kristin Peterson, Ret. CSM Brooks Schild, and Governor Kristi Noem.



Their shared messages emphasized that we will never be able to repay our fallen for what they have done for our nation. However, we can, and we must, support their loved ones who still have open seats at the dinner table and who will never get to share another birthday, anniversary or holiday with their sons, daughters, fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters. They encouraged us all to not take our democracy for granted and to recom-

mit ourselves to upholding the values and freedoms for which they gave their lives. And to always remember that our freedoms came at a price, so we must cherish and protect them for ourselves and generations of Americans to come.



A big shout out to Erin Brown and her staff at the cemetery for their con-

tinued commitment and dedication in maintaining and showcasing our state veterans cemetery. Special thanks also to all the staff and volunteers that assisted with preparations for Memorial Day.



***"RIDING TO KEEP THEM FLYING"***



**HONOR RIDE**  
**MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT**



***Sunday, June 30, 2024 | 2:30 PM***

Registration begins at 1:00 PM at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance (they will be open for lunch at 12:00 PM). Honor a Veteran you know and ride to raise funds for Midwest Honor Flight. Ride includes a slow salute past the Sioux Falls VA Hospital before a ceremony at the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery. A meal is included after the ride.

**MORE INFORMATION:**

**[MIDWESTHONORFLIGHT.ORG/RIDE](https://MIDWESTHONORFLIGHT.ORG/RIDE)**

*All proceeds from this event go directly towards future Honor Flights and more importantly, our local Veterans.*

# SD TO DEDICATE 12 FALLEN HERO BRIDGES

The South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be hosting 12 fallen hero bridge dedication ceremonies this year, honoring 15 veterans.

In 2019, Governor Kristi Noem and the South Dakota Departments of Veterans Affairs, Military, and Transportation launched the Fallen Heroes Bridge Dedication Program with the mission of dedicating state bridges to South Dakotans who were killed in action while serving their country or classified as missing in action.

“Naming South Dakota bridges in honor of our fallen gives us the opportunity of remembrance, reflection, and respect—to honor the men and women who gave their lives in service to this nation,” said South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Secretary Greg Whitlock. “These men and women, so young and in such a short time, met their destiny on far off battlefields. In return for their great gift, there is nothing more complex or important that we can do but to ensure the memories of their shortened lives go on.”

This year’s 12 bridge dedications include:

- Jun 29—LT Donald R. and SGT Fred H. Harms—Tripp American Legion Post 142 (102 S. Main Street)— 2:00 pm (CT);
- Jul 3—SGT Lelund M. Kahler—Belle Fourche Rec Center (1111 National St)—2:00 pm (MT);
- Jul 10—T/5 Harald Haraldsen—Buffalo Lions Civic Center (210 State Road 20)— 2:00 pm (MT);
- Jul 19—CPL Russell N. Ferdig—Elk Point United Parish (2102 E. Main St)—2:00 pm (CT);
- Jul 24—CPL John C. McDowell—Corsica Travel Plaza (HWY 281 and Main St)—11:00 am (CT);
- Aug 2—PFC John Tuin—Estelline American Legion Post 184 (222 Main St)—1:30 pm (CT);
- Aug 5—RM2 Eugene L., RM2 Ordien F., and LT LeRoy M. Herr—Bristol High School Gym (500 S. 3rd St)— 1:30 pm (CT);
- Aug 10—SGT Terry G. Rada—Geddes Multi-Purpose Center (409 Michigan Ave)—12:00 noon (CT);
- Aug 17—SGT Dennis D. Lawver—Miller American Legion Post (402 S. Broadway Ave)—2:00 pm (CT);
- Aug 18—PFC Gunnar D. Becker—Sanborn County 4-H Building in Forestburg (23237 405th Ave)— 2:00 pm (CT);
- Aug 21—1LT Daniel J. Kirchgesler—St Thomas More High School in Rapid City (300 Fairmont Blvd)—2:00 pm (MT); and
- Nov 11—1LT Josef L. Thorne—Beresford High School Gym (301 W. Maple St)—1:30 pm (CT).

“We are committed to preserving their memories and demonstrating our will to remember. We ask everyone to participate in one of the 12 bridge dedications scheduled in 2024,” said Secretary Whitlock

To learn more about South Dakota’s fallen heroes bridge dedication program, visit [vet-affairs.sd.gov](https://vet-affairs.sd.gov).

# SDNG FACILITATES ACADEMIC AND GOVERNMENT EXCHANGE WITH SDSM&T IN SURINAME

Three faculty members from the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology (SDSM&T) travelled with the South Dakota National Guard (SDNG) to Suriname April 23-27 for an academic and government exchange as part of the State Partnership Program (SPP). The goal of the exchange was to expand the partnership to include civilian to civilian exchanges in academics and incorporate SDSM&T in planned engineer operations.

During the exchange, SDSM&T faculty members met with the United States ambassador to Suriname and other senior embassy staff to discuss opportunities for collaboration between the SDSM&T and Suriname.

“We are always looking for new ways to improve and expand our partnership with Suriname. We have been doing engineering projects in Suriname for the better part of the last decade, incorporating the SDSM&T makes perfect sense at this stage in our partnership.” said Chief Warrant Officer 2 Nelson, State Partnership Program Coordinator for the SDNG.

The SDNG and SDSM&T are working together to incorporate SDSM&T senior design projects into future SDNG and Suriname Defense Force engineer operations in Suriname. The SDSM&T also had the opportunity to observe a vertical engineering operation conducted by SDNG Soldiers.

While in Suriname, Dr. Laurie Anderson, Dr. Rudrajit Mitra, and Dr. Sarah Keenan met with faculty from Anton de Kom University in Paramaribo where they collaborated on curriculum and established new and creative ways to work together to establish and formalize a Master of Science in Mining Geology between the two institutions.

The faculty members were presented with certificates of appreciation by Army Brig. Gen. Deb Bartunek, SDNG Director Joint Staff at Camp Rapid during a meeting where they discussed and planned for future possibilities of training and development in Suriname.

“It’s really impressive how well South Dakota National Guard is regarded in Suriname, and actually in South America in general,” said Dr. Anderson.

“We are very proud of our partnership with Suriname and are honored to be as successful as we are with the length of our partnership in that area of responsibility as we continue to grow it,” said Bartunek.

The exchange expanded the current South Dakota and Suriname partnership by creating new and exciting civilian to civilian relationships and looks to expand in the coming years.



# SIoux FALLS VETERANS COMMUNITY PROJECT

During the past six months, more than 66 volunteers from the Sioux Falls business community came together to raise money that was needed to build the village center for the Veterans Community Project in Sioux Falls.

The village center is where the magic will happen, and is a crucial part of their mission. It will be a place to gather, learn, and grow.

Also, new to the VCP is a brand new Subaru Ascent donated by Schulte Subaru for staff to transport the veteran residents to appointments.

If you're not familiar with this project, you can learn more at: [veteranscommunityproject.org](http://veteranscommunityproject.org). The VCP is located at 367 N. Willow Avenue in Sioux Falls.



# BROWN COUNTY CONTINUES TO GROW THEIR COFFEE WITH VETERANS

Benefits and policies for veterans continue to change and become more complex from year to year. That is one of the many reasons Brown County Veterans Service Officers Aaron Walberg and Jessie Milbrandt continue to host “coffee with veterans” programs.

Their free, professional assistance helps veterans and their families get the health care, disability, education and financial benefits they earned; staying with them through every step of the process.

Walberg has been a strong, advocate for veteran’s rights and benefits locally, regionally, and nationally. This week during their coffee program, Congressman Johnson stopped in and visited with the veterans.

Walberg and Milbrandt help make sure that, after defending our freedom, our veterans and loved ones get the care they earned.





# VETERAN STAND DOWN PINE RIDGE



**WHEN** - June 7, 2024 from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.  
**WHERE** - Pine Ridge Pow Wow Grounds, Pine Ridge, SD

### SERVICES OFFERED

LUNCH  
 CLOTHING  
 VA BENEFITS  
 HOUSING REFERRALS

EMPLOYMENT SERVICES  
 LEGAL ASSISTANCE  
 READJUSTMENT COUNSELING  
 VA Eye Screening and Reading Glasses  
 MUCH MORE!

Please bring a copy of your DD214, Dependent information, and identification to the event. Documentation is needed so we can fully serve you and your needs.

For questions, contact:

Clay Thompson at (605)206-0046  
 Adriane M. Cox at: (605) 499-8671  
 Shawnee Red Bear, USMC Vet, Oglala Sioux Tribe Veteran Service Officer at 605-407-8733 (cell), or shawnee@ogla.org.



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Veterans Health Administration  
 Black Hills Health Care System



## FREE Shows - June 9th



June 9<sup>th</sup> at 3:00 pm at the  
 Alliance

**FREE to EVERYONE**

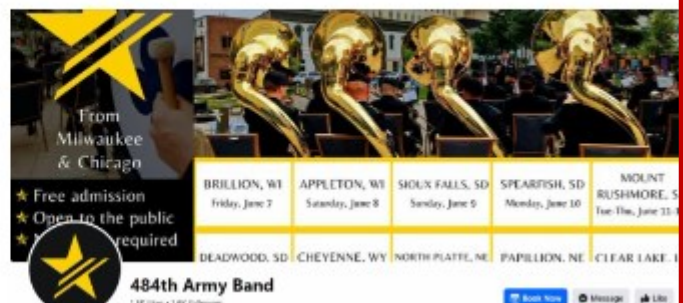
Captain Charlie Plumb -  
 The Power of Purpose

sponsored by Thrivent

**FREE - Please Preregister Here!**



484<sup>th</sup> Army Band performing  
 LIVE June 9<sup>th</sup> at 5:30pm at  
 the Alliance  
**FREE to EVERYONE**



# COPAY CHANGES FOR MENTAL HEALTH CARE VISITS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs announced that veterans no longer need to pay copays for their first three outpatient mental health care and substance use disorder visits of each calendar year through 2027. This benefit expands veterans' access to mental health services and lowers their out-of-pocket costs.

This copayment exemption benefits dates back to June 27, 2023, and—by law—will end Dec. 29, 2027. To be eligible for this exemption, the outpatient visit must be with a qualified mental health professional at VA or provided through VA's network of community care providers. The VA will automatically refund veterans for any copays paid to VA on or after June 27, 2023, for these appointments, with no further action required by those veterans.

## COPAY CHANGES

In addition to this copayment exemption, VA launched a new policy in 2023 allowing eligible veterans and certain former service members in acute suicidal crisis to go to any VA or non-VA emergency facility for no-cost emergency health care. Since then, more than 60,000 veterans and former service members have used this benefit — providing them with lifesaving care and saving millions of dollars in health care costs. The policy increased access to no-cost emergent suicide care for up to nine million individuals, because eligible individuals do not need to be enrolled in the VA system or go to a department facility to use this benefit.

To maximize access to world-class mental health care, the VA has been aggressively hiring mental health professionals nationwide. Over the last three fiscal years, the VHA hired more than 9,000 mental health positions including psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists, licensed professional mental health counselors, peer support specialists, mental health nurses and mental health physician assistants — including 2,000 hires during fiscal year 2024.

# EXTENSION OF VETERAN FORECLOSURE MORATORIUM

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs has issued guidance to strongly encourage mortgage servicers to implement a targeted moratorium on foreclosures for veterans with VA-guaranteed loans through December 31, 2024.

This new, targeted foreclosure moratorium will help ensure that veterans and their families are able to stay in their homes while mortgage servicers implement the Veterans Affairs Servicing Purchase (VASP) program – a new, last-resort tool for qualified veterans experiencing severe financial hardship. Through VASP, the VA will purchase qualified veterans' modified loans from their loan servicers and then place them in the VA-owned portfolio as direct loans – making the loans more affordable for veterans. VASP officially launches on May 31 and mortgage servicers must have it fully implemented by October 1, 2024.

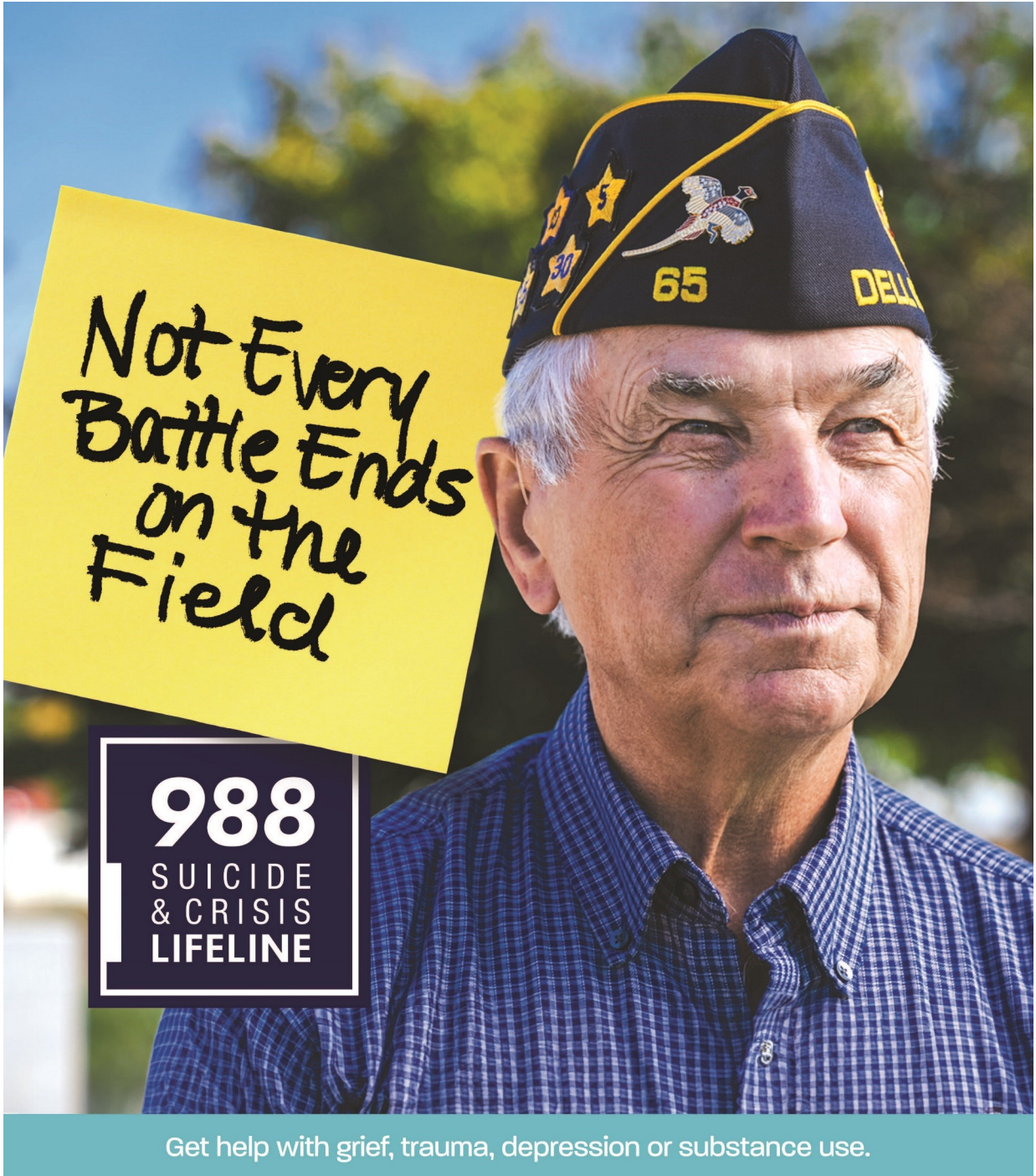
Veterans facing financial hardship should contact their mortgage servicer and work with them to explore all available home retention options. For additional assistance, veterans can always contact the VA directly by calling 877-827-3702, option 4, or by visiting the [VA Home Loans](#) website for additional information.

When a veteran experiences financial hardship, the VA has a range of options to help stay in their homes. The VA's home retention options include:

- **Forbearance Agreements:** Temporarily reducing or pausing payments for those facing short-term financial difficulties. Loan payments will still be owed at the end of the special forbearance and will not be automatically put on the end of the loan.
- **Repayment Plans:** Arranging plans to catch up on missed payments gradually.
- **Loan Modifications:** Adjusting loan terms to make monthly payments more manageable.
- **VASP:** Once a veteran has exhausted all other home retention options, they may qualify for VASP. With VASP, qualified borrowers will have a fixed 2.5% interest rate, which will provide consistent, affordable payments for the remainder of their loan.

This targeted foreclosure moratorium will apply to all VA-guaranteed loans unless 1) the loan is secured by property that is vacant or abandoned, 2) the servicer has documented that the borrower desires neither to retain homeownership nor avoid foreclosure, 3) the servicer has not received a monthly payment for at least 210 days, and the borrower is not responding to the servicer's outreach attempts, or 4) the servicer has evaluated the borrower for all home retention options but has determined that no home retention option, including VASP, or alternative to foreclosure will work for the borrower. For more information on the targeted foreclosure moratorium, please visit the [VA Home Loan website](#).

For additional assistance, visit VA's [foreclosure support and prevention](#) website.



Dial **988**, then press **1**  
for veteran-specific support.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

- Jun 1—Rich Schild Memorial Poker Run—Keg—Tabor—1:00 pm (CT)
- Jun 5—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 20—Welcome Home Ceremony—Convention Center—(1201 N. West Ave)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
- Jun 7—8—VFW State Conference—Holiday Inn—Spearfish
- Jun 14—Midwest Honor Flight Day of Sweetness—Chick-fil-A—(4005 W. 41st St)—Sioux Falls—7:00 am —10:00 pm (CT)
- Jun 20—23—American Legion State Conference—Pierre
- Jun 29—LT Donald R. and SGT Fred H. Harms Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—American Legion Post 142—(102 S. Main Street)—Tripp— 2:00 pm (CT)
- Jun 30—Midwest Honor Flight Honor Ride—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls—Registration—1:00 pm/Ride Begins at 2:30 pm (CT)
- Jul 3—SGT Lelund M. Kahler Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Rec Center—(1111 National Street)—Belle Fourche—2:00 pm (MT)
- Jul 10—T/5 Harald Haraldsen Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Lions Civic Center—(210 State Road 20)—Buffalo - 2:00 pm (MT)
- Jul 15—6th Annual Tee it up for the Troops Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—Arrowhead Country Club—(3675 Sheridan Lake Road)—Rapid City—7:15 am (MT)
- Jul 17—SD Veterans Council Meeting—VFW Post 17—(802 S. Main St)—Aberdeen
- Jul 19—CPL Russell N. Ferdig Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—United Parish—(2102 E. Main Street)—Elk Point—2:00 pm (CT)
- Jul 24—CPL John C. McDowell Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Travel Plaza—(HWY 281 and Main Street)—Corsica—11:00 am (CT)
- Aug 1—2—South Dakota Suicide Prevention Conference—Convention Center—(1201 N. West Ave)—Sioux Falls
- Aug 2—PFC John Tuin Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—American Legion Post 184—(222 Main Street)—Estelline—1:30 pm (CT)
- Aug 5—RM2 Eugene L., RM2 Ordien F., and LT LeRoy M. Herr Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—High School Gym—(500 S. 3rd Street) Bristol— 1:30 pm (CT)
- Aug 10—SGT Terry G. Rada Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Multi Purpose Center—(409 Michigan Avenue)—Geddes—12:00 noon (CT)
- Aug 17—SGT Dennis D. Lawver Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—American Legion Post—(402 S. Broadway Avenue)—Miller—2:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 18—PFC Gunnar D. Becker Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Sanborn County 4-H Building—(23237 405th Avenue)—Forestburg—2:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 21—SD Veterans Council Meeting—VFW Post 791—(209 S. Cedar)—Yankton
- Aug 21—1LT Daniel J. Kirchgesler Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—St Thomas More High School—(300 Fairmont Blvd)—Rapid City—2:00 pm (MT)
- Aug 26—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th St)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—8:00 pm (CT)

(Continued)

# UPCOMING EVENTS

- Aug 28—Sep 2—SD State Fair—Huron
- Aug 29—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair—Northwest Energy Freedom Stage—Huron
- Sep 3—5—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls
- Sep 18—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Rapid City
- Oct 12—Midwest Honor Flight Third Annual Elvis Night—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St)—Sioux Falls
- Oct 16—SD Veterans Council Meeting—American Legion Post—(1229 Western Ave)—Brookings
- Nov 9—Fifth Annual Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair We've Got Your Six—Sturgis Community Center—(1401 Lazelle Street)—Sturgis—11:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)
- Nov 9—Third Annual Day County Veterans Banquet—Webster Armory—5:00 pm (CT)
- Nov 11—1LT Josef Thorne Fallen Hero Bridge Dedication—Beresford High School Gym—(301 W. Maple Street) —Beresford—1:30 pm (CT)
- Nov 18—Wreaths Across America Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th St)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—8:00 pm (CT)
- Nov 20—SD Veterans Council Meeting—DAV—(1519 W. 51st St)—Sioux Falls
- Nov 20—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Sioux Falls
- Nov 21—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Watertown
- Nov 22—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Rapid City
- Nov 23—SD Veterans Council Legislative Round Table—Pierre
- Dec 3—Governor's Budget Address—1:00 pm
- Dec 14—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

## 2025 Events

- Jan 14—Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm
- Jan 14—Legislative Session starts
- Jan 15—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Pierre
- Feb 14—16—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Oacoma
- Jun 12—15—VFW State Convention—Ramkota—Pierre
- Jun 19—22—American Legion State Conference—Huron
- Dec 13—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

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