

NEWSLE'I''''ER

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



A Bridge Between Us, a local non-profit organization in Scenic, S.D., received a monetary gift from the Camp Rapid Christmas Party Committee during their holiday party at Joint Force Headquarters on Dec. 9, 2024.

Annually during the Christmas party, a recipient is voted on by the committee to receive a donation fundraised by the volunteer members of the committee. This year, a \$1,500 donation was raised.

Founded in 2023 by Nate and Lexie Sobolewski, A Bridge Between Us started out as a vision born from their own difficult transition experience as Nate retired after 20 years of service and struggled transitioning.

"Our goal is to bring light to the problems that our heroes face on a day-to-day basis and help them walk through these issues by offering veterans affairs assistance,

guided hunts, resource referrals, lodging, and most importantly networking with other veterans, military, and servicemembers," said the Sobolewski's.

Their mission is to support veterans, but it has quickly evolved to be open to helping provide resources to police officers, firefighters, and their families.

"We started this because we went through it and having that experience, we are able to empathize with people who are struggling," said Nate.

This community outreach donation exemplifies the roots of the South Dakota National Guard culture of excellence of our force in support of the communities that we come from and to those who support the local and federal missions.

If you would like to learn more about A Bridge Between Us and their mission visit <u>https://www.abridgebetweenus.org/about-us</u>.

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

VA PROPOSES TO EXEMPT VETERANS FROM PAYING CERTAIN COPAYS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs announced a proposed rule to exempt veterans from paying copays for certain inpatient and outpatient Whole Health well-being services, which are available at VA facilities nationwide.

Whole Health well-being services, which focus on the overall well-being of the veteran independent of treatment for a specific medical condition or diagnosis, are an important aspect of the VA care. Copayment exempt services include Whole Health education, health and wellness coaching, skill-building programs, and complementary and integrative health services such as yoga and meditation.

"Copayment exemptions for Whole Health services is a step forward in creating greater access to preventative care for veterans," said VA Under Secretary for Health Shereef Elnahal.

"The VA is the best and most affordable care in America for veterans — and this proposed ruling is another step forward to ensuring that cost never prevents a veteran from getting the care they deserve."

Expanding access to VA care is an ongoing top priority. While only some veterans require copays for VA care, the VA



What matters most to you?

Whole Health is all about you and what matters most to you. You and your care team work together to design a plan so you can live your best life. Learn more »

Getting Started

has long acknowledged that copayments can deter veterans from obtaining care, creating a barrier for participation in those programs. When veterans become more actively involved in their medical care it leads to improved health care outcomes and, in turn, lower overall health care costs. There are currently multiple copayment exemptions for programs such as weight management counseling and publicly announced VA public health initiatives (for example, health fairs) or outpatient visits solely consisting of preventative screening and immunizations which has encouraged participation in these offerings.

The proposed rule exempting certain Whole Health well-being services from copayment aims to assist veterans in becoming more actively involved in their health care and continue to seek services through these important programs.

The rulemaking can be viewed in the Federal Register under public inspection, and will be published and open for comment beginning Jan. 6 (findable by searching for the rule on VA's Federal Register webpage).

For more information about VA Whole Health, visit the VA Whole Health Services website.

VA EXPANDS ACCESS TO GI BILL BENEFITS

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs announced that — following the 2024 Rudisill <u>Supreme Court decision</u> — it has updated the process for awarding GI Bill benefits. This change means that many veterans who served multiple periods of military service (for example, veterans who reenlisted) will be eligible for up to an additional 12 months of education benefits.

Under the previous policy, eligible veterans who served at least two periods of service were limited to a maximum total of 36 months of GI Bill benefits, between the Montgomery GI Bill and the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Under the updated policy, that limitation is removed — meaning that eligible veterans can now qualify for up to 48 months of total GI Bill benefits.

This policy change also means that many veterans who were previously limited to 36 months will now be eligible for additional education benefits. Specifically, veterans who served at least two qualifying periods of service — one that qualified them for the Montgomery GI Bill and a second that qualified them for the Post-9/11 GI Bill — may be eligible to receive up to 12 months of additional GI Bill benefits (bringing them to a total of 48 months). This could impact as many as 1.04 million veterans and beneficiaries, and the VA is launching a targeted outreach campaign to make sure that every veteran gets the additional benefits they deserve.

"This policy will not only help veterans who apply for GI Bill benefits in the future — it will also allow the VA to provide additional benefits to many veterans who used GI Bill benefits in the past," said Under Secretary for Benefits Joshua Jacobs. "Every veteran has earned the right to get a good, affordable education — and under this new policy, many veterans will get additional 12 months of GI Bill benefits."

Of the 1.04 million veterans who may potentially be eligible for an additional 12 months of benefits, the VA will be able to automatically adjudicate the claims for approximately 660,000 without any further action required on their part. For all remaining veterans, the VA will be reaching out to them directly to encourage them to file a claim.

As a part of this policy, the VA is also extending the expiration dates for using GI Bill benefits for eligible veterans. For each veteran with multiple periods of service who chose the Post-9/11 GI Bill over the Montgomery GI Bill, the VA will reinstate the time they had remaining at the time of their election plus 90 days. For example, if a veteran chose to use the Post-9/11 GI Bill at a time when they had five years left to use the Montgomery GI Bill, they would be given five years plus 90 days to use any additional Montgomery GI Bill benefits. To receive an expiration date extension, applications must be submitted by October 1, 2030.

Since its inception, the Post-9/11 GI Bill has paid over \$143 billion to over 2.7 million beneficiaries. The GI Bill has long been used as a recruiting and retention tool for the military. It has enabled veterans and service members — as well as their eligible dependents, through the Department of Defense Transfer of Education Benefits program — to train and attend school while greatly reducing their out-of-pocket costs.

To learn more about this change, including how to apply visit the Rudisill webpage.

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

IMPACT OF RUDISILL SUPREME COURT DECISION ON EDUCATION BENEFITS

If you're ready to apply for additional benefits under the Rudisill decision, complete the VA Form 22-1995. Be sure to select that you are requesting a Rudisill review on page two of the online application. Once the VA has received and evaluated your claim, you will receive an official decision.

Please note that if you are approved, your new delimiting date will be calculated based upon when you apply. If you are not ready to use your benefits, the VA encourages veterans to wait until they are ready to prevent their benefits from expiring before they are able to use them.

The deadline to receive a new expiration date recalculation is October 1, 2030. After October 1, 2030, a veteran can still submit a claim for benefits; however, the normal delimiting date calculation rules will apply.

What has changed?

On April 16, 2024 the <u>Supreme Court of the United States decided</u> that if a veteran served at least two periods of service-one that qualifies for the Montgomery GI Bill (MGIB) and another that qualifies for the Post-9/11 GI Bill (PGIB)-they may be able to receive additional GI Bill benefits.

BEFORE	NOW
 Beneficiaries eligible for both MGIB and PGIB were required to waive MGIB eligibility to begin using PGIB benefits. 	 Beneficiaries impacted by the Court's decision are no longer required to waive MGIB eligibility to use PGIB benefits when applying.
 PGIB entitlement was limited to the amount of remaining MGIB entitlement. 	 PGIB entitlement is no longer limited to the amount of remaining MGIB entitlement, but beneficiaries are still subject to the 48-month limit for combined
 Previous elections to waive MGIB could not be revoked. 	benefits under multiple programs.
	 Previous elections to waive MGIB in order to use PGIB can be revoked.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. How is the VA notifying veterans who may have been impacted by these changes?

A.The VA is distributing communications to potentially impacted veterans. Veterans who believe they may have been impacted by these changes but did not receive an email from the VA, should refer to the eligibility section for further guidance. <u>Best direction for the veteran is to</u> <u>submit a claim to determine eligibility.</u>

RUDISILL DECISION (CONTINUED)

Q. Will I be able to transfer the additional benefits to my spouse, dependents, or survivors?

A. Your eligibility to transfer benefits to your spouse, dependents, or survivors will not be impacted by this decision. Existing transfer of entitlement requirements and limitations of use apply to any additional PGIB benefits veterans might receive because of the Court's decision. For example, if a veteran previously transferred PGIB benefits to a dependent and wishes to transfer the additional PGIB entitlement, they must follow the existing <u>instructions for changing</u> <u>your transferred benefits</u>. If they are not on Active Duty and were not approved to transfer of benefits while still on Active Duty, the Court's decision will not make them eligible to do so. *Note: The Department of Defense decides whether veterans can transfer GI Bill benefits to their family. The VA does not have the authority to change or waive the eligibility requirements, age cap, or other limitations related to transfer of entitlement.*

Q. Will I be given a new delimiting date?

A. For eligible veterans who previously had to forfeit their additional benefits in order to use their PGIB, the VA will recalculate their benefit expiration date and provide them any return time after the election was made to use the benefit. The new expiration will be calculated by adding the time a veteran had left when they previously forfeited their benefit to 90 days plus the date of issuance of the new Certificate of Eligibility (COE).

Q. Can I waive my MGIB benefits to receive a refund of my \$1,200 MGIB contribution and PGIB kicker payments?

A. Yes, a veteran can still voluntarily elect to waive their MGIB benefits and receive PGIB kicker payments and a refund of their \$1,200 MGIB contribution.

Q. I was told I had to waive my MGIB benefits to use PGIB benefits even though I had two periods of service. Can I revoke that decision and use MGIB? Do I have to pay back the \$1,200 refund?

A. Yes, if a veteran was previously required to make an election to waive MGIB even though they had two periods of qualifying service, the VA will revoke prior elections. However, if a revocation will result in a reduction to their current benefit payment amount, they will be given the choice whether they wish to revoke their election (reducing their current benefit payment amount) or retain their election (maintaining their current benefits payment amount). If they received a refund of the \$1,200 contribution, they will not be required to pay it back.

Q. I waived MGIB or MGIB-SR benefits to receive a kicker under my PGIB benefits. Because of the Court's decision, can I revoke that decision and get back my MGIB or MGIB-SR? If so, do I have to pay back the kicker?

A.Yes, a veteran can revoke their decision to waive MGIB or MGIB-SR benefits. However, they are only eligible for their kicker payments if they voluntarily waived MGIB or MGIB-SR benefits. If the veteran revokes their waiver, they may get extra months of MGIB or MGIB-SR but they will lose their MGIB or MGIB-SR kicker payments under PGIB. They will not be required to pay back any kicker payments they have already received, but any remaining kicker entitlement will be paid under their remaining MGIB or MGIB-SR benefits.

RUDISILL DECISION (CONTINUED)

Q. Do I have to submit my request for a decision by a certain date?

A. A veteran can submit a claim at any time. However, there is a limited period of time for a veteran to receive a delimiting (expiration) date recalculation. The deadline to submit a claim is October 1, 2030. After October 1, 2030, a veteran can still submit a claim for benefits; however, the normal delimiting date calculation rules will apply.

Q. Does this affect my Veteran Readiness & Employment benefits?

A. Veterans who are currently participating or were previously participating on or after August 15, 2018, in the Veteran Readiness & Employment (VR&E) program and did not have eligibility to Post-9/11 GI Bill (PGIB) benefits when they elected which subsistence allowance they wanted to receive (Chapter 31 or PGIB rate), but have since been granted retroactive PGIB benefits, may now be eligible to receive the basic allowance for housing (BAH) subsistence rate. The BAH subsistence rate is often higher than the standard Chapter 31 rate. If a veteran is granted retroactive PGIB entitlement, VR&E will automatically adjust the rate and pay the difference, if the PGIB rate is more beneficial to the veteran.

If you have general questions about GI Bill benefits, please visit: Education and Training Home.

For questions regarding Veteran Readiness and Employment benefits, please visit: Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) Home.



4TH ANNUAL STAND UP FOR WOMEN VETERANS RETREAT

The 4th Annual Stand Up for Women Veterans Retreat will be held Saturday, March 29, 2025, from 9:00 am—2:00 pm at Our Savior's Lutheran Church ELCA on West 33rd Street in Sioux Falls.

The retreat provides a supportive space for women veterans and their "plus ones" (friends, partners, family, or mentors) to foster strength, connection, and understanding.

Attendees can access personalized support from VA representatives and state/community organizations throughout the day. The Expo serves as a one-stop shop for individualized guidance, offering participants the opportunity to:

- Learn about federal and state benefits;
- Get help with disability claims; and
- Explore VA services. Interested veterans can register at: https://www.eventbrite.com/e/1135046587899?aff=oddtdtcreator.



VA INCREASES PRESUMPTIVES

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs announced that it is making acute and chronic leukemias, multiple myelomas, myelodysplastic syndromes, myelofibrosis, urinary bladder, ureter, and related genitourinary cancers presumptive for service-connection for:

• **Gulf War Veterans:** Veterans who served in Somalia or the Southwest Asia theater of operations (which includes Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, the neutral zone between Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea, and the airspace above these locations) during the Persian Gulf War on or after Aug. 2, 1990.

• **Post-9/11 Veterans:** Veterans who served in Afghanistan, Iraq, Djibouti, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen, or Uzbekistan and the airspace above these locations during the Gulf War on or after Sept. 11, 2001. This includes Veterans who served at the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) base in Uzbekistan after Sept. 11, 2001.

This step lowers the burden of proof for these veterans, meaning that they do not need to prove that their service caused their condition to receive benefits for it. Instead, the VA automatically assumes service connection for the condition and provides benefits accordingly. Additionally, when a veteran becomes service connected for a health condition, it gives them access to free health care for that condition. The presumptions for urinary bladder, ureter, and related genitourinary cancers went into effect Jan. 2, 2025, and the presumptions for acute and chronic leukemias, multiple myelomas, and myelodysplastic syndromes, myelofibrosis will be effective Jan. 10, 2025.

Since the PACT Act was signed into law, the VA has conducted the largest outreach campaign in VA history to ensure that veterans are signing up for the care and benefits they are newly eligible for. As a result of this effort, nearly 890,000 veterans have signed up for VA care since the bill was signed into law (a nearly 40% increase over the previous equivalent period) and veterans have submitted more than 4.8 million applications for VA benefits (a 42% increase over the previous equivalent period and an all-time record). In total, more than 1.3 million veterans have enrolled in VA health care since 2021, and the VA has delivered more than \$600 billion in earned benefits directly to veterans, their families, and survivors during that time.

In addition to supporting all veterans who served during the Gulf War, Iraq War, and Afghanistan War, these steps are also a part of a comprehensive effort the VA is undertaking to listen to veterans who served at the Karshi-Khanabad base and ensure that the VA is providing them and their survivors — with the care and benefits they deserve. Partly as a result of these efforts, K2 Veterans have higher claim and approval rates than any other cohort of veterans: 13,002 K2 Veterans of the approximately 16,000 known K2 Veterans are currently enrolled in VA health care, more than 11,800 are service connected for at least one condition, the average K2 Veteran is service connected for 14.6 conditions at a 70% disability rating, and the average serviceconnected K2 Veteran receives an average of \$30,000 a year in earned benefits. The VA continues to work to ensure that all K2 Veterans get access to the benefits they deserve.

FREE COMPUTERS FOR VETERANS, MILITARY PERSONNEL AND FIRST RESPONDERS

The South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance Inc. in Sioux Falls has over 80 free computers that are available for veterans, active duty personnel, first responders, and their families. The computers are provided by First PREMIER Bank and PREMIER Bankcard.

If interested, please compete this <u>form</u>—please put "free computer" in the reason for visit field.



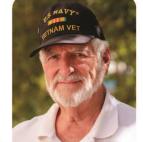
South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs South Dakota Department of the Military













VA S.A.V.E. TRAINING FOUR WAYS YOU CAN HELP A VETERAN IN CRISIS

What is VA S.A.V.E. Training?

VA S.A.V.E. Training is a free, brief online or in-person course that will help you act with care and compassion if you come across a Veteran who is in crisis or having thoughts of suicide. The acronym S.A.V.E. helps you remember the important steps involved in suicide prevention:



Know the Signs that indicate a Veteran might be thinking about suicide



Ask the most important question of all —

"Are you thinking of killing yourself?"

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Validate the Veteran's experience

Encourage treatment and Expedite getting help





How to Support a Veteran in Crisis

Keep these tips in mind when talking with a Veteran who may be at risk for suicide:

- Remain calm
- Listen more than you speak
- Maintain eye contact
- Act with confidence
- Do not argue
- Use open body language
- Limit questions—Let the Veteran do the talking
- Use supportive, hopeful comments
- Be honest—There are no quick solutions, but help is available

Additional Resources

- VA Mental Health Services: Get information about inpatient and outpatient services available through VA at <u>MentalHealth.VA.gov</u>.
- Online Resource Locator: Find VA facilities, Vet Centers, suicide prevention coordinators, and other VA resources at <u>VeteransCrisisLine.net/</u> LocalResources.
- Keep It Secure: Promotes awareness about the simple steps you can take to protect yourself and your family. It focuses on sharing information about secure gun and medication storage, the warning signs of suicide, and how to find the support you or a Veteran loved one needs. <u>KeepItSecure.net</u>
- **Don't wait. Reach out.:** Use this site to find support and resources designed specifically for Veterans. If you're a family member or a friend, you can also find resources for the Veteran in your life. <u>VA.gov/REACH</u>

Do you want to host a VA S.A.V.E. Training?

Contact your local VA Suicide Prevention Coordinator to schedule a *FREE* in-person training: <u>605-720-7087</u>

You can use VA S.A.V.E Training for all people, not just Veterans.

You don't have to be enrolled in VA benefits or health care to take VA S.A.V.E. Training.

FOUR WAYS YOU CAN HELP A VETERAN IN CRISIS



Know the Signs that indicate a Veteran may be thinking about suicide

The signs below may indicate that a Veteran needs help. If you or a Veteran you know is experiencing any of these, contact the Veterans Crisis Line:

- · Hopelessness, feeling like there's no way out
- Anxiety, agitation, sleeplessness, or mood swings
- Feeling like there's no reason to live
- Rage or anger .
- Engaging in risky activities without thinking .
- Increasing alcohol or drug use
- Withdrawing from family and friends

The signs below require immediate attention. If you or a Veteran you know is experiencing any of these and needs medical attention, call 911 now:

- · When asked, they express a desire to hurt or kill themself
- When prompted, they reveal they're looking for ways to die by suicide
- They talk about death, dying, or suicide
- They begin to exhibit self-destructive behavior, such as increased drug or alcohol use, talking about obtaining/ using weapons for self-harm, or saving up medication

Ask the most important question of all: A "Are you thinking of killing yourself?"

Other ways to ask the question include: "Are you thinking of suicide?" or "Have you had thoughts about taking your own life?"

When asking the question, remember:

- DO ask the question if you've identified warning signs
- DO ask the question in such a way that's natural and flows . with the conversation
- DON'T ask the question as though you're looking for a "no" answer ("You're not thinking of killing yourself, are you?")
- DON'T wait to ask the question until they're halfway out . the door



Veteran's experience

Use the following steps to let the Veteran know you're listening and acknowledge their experience:

- Talk openly about suicide. Be willing to listen, allow the Veteran to express their feelings, and make supportive, encouraging comments.
- Recognize the situation is serious
- Don't pass judgement



Encourage treatment and Expedite getting help

If a Veteran is having thoughts of suicide, remain calm and reassure them help is available:

- DON'T keep the Veteran's suicidal behavior a secret
- . DON'T leave them alone
- Try to get the Veteran to seek immediate help from their doctor or the nearest hospital or emergency room
- Call 911

Safety is Important

Never negotiate with someone who has a gun. Get to safety and call 911. If the Veteran has taken pills, cut themself, or has done harm to themself in some way, call 911.



DIAL 988 then PRESS

Chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net/Chat • Text 838255

The Veterans Crisis Line isn't just for Veterans. Our responders can connect Veterans' families and friends with helpful resources.

> 09/2023 edited by BHHCS

2025 UPCOMING EVENTS

- Jan 12-13 VFW State Legislative Conference—Moose Lodge—Fort Pierre
- Jan 13—VFW State Legislative Open House—AmericInn—(312 Island Drive)—Fort Pierre—5:00—8:00 pm (CT)
- Jan 14—Governor's State of the State Address—1:00 pm
- Jan 14—Legislative Session starts
- Jan 15—SD Veterans Council Meeting—American Legion Post 8—(520 S. Pierre Street)—Pierre—2:00 pm (CT)
- Jan 15—SDDVA/SD Veterans Council Legislative Reception—American Legion Post 8—(520 S. Pierre Street)— Pierre—5:30—7:30 pm (CT)
- Jan 20—State Offices Closed—Martin Luther King Day
- Feb 6—SDNG Dining Out—Ramkota Hotel—(920 W. Sioux Avenue)—Pierre—6:00 pm (CT)
- Feb 14-16—American Legion Mid-Winter Conference—Oacoma
- Feb 17—State Offices Closed—President's Day
- Mar 29—Stand Up for Women Veterans Retreat—Our Savior's Lutheran Church ELCA—(West 33rd Street)— Sioux Falls—9:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- Apr 15—Dine to Donate for Midwest Honor Flight—Texas Roadhouse—(4307 W. Empire Place)—Sioux Falls— 3:30 pm—10:00 pm (CT)
- Apr 25-26—State DAV Convention—AmericInn—Aberdeen
- Apr 27-30—VFW Proficiency Training Conference—Annapolis, MD
- May 6-8—SDDVA Mini Conferences
- May 26—State Offices Closed—Memorial Day
- Jun 10-MWHF Day of Sweetness-Chick-Fil-A-(4005 W. 41st Street)-Sioux Falls-6:30 am-10:00 pm (CT)
- Jun 14—MWHF Pars and Pubs—Downtown Sioux Falls—11:00 am—4:00 pm (CT)
- Jun 19—State Offices Closed—Juneteenth Day
- Jun 19-22—VFW State Convention—Ramkota—Pierre
- Jun 19-22—American Legion State Conference—Huron
- Jun 29—MWHF Honor Ride—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls— 1:00 pm (CT)
- Jul 4—State Offices Closed—Fourth of July
- Jul 14—Black Hills Tee it up for the Troops Tournament—Arrowhead Country Club—Rapid City
- Aug 4-5—Your Journey Matters 2025 Behavioral Health Conference—Sioux Falls Sheraton Convention Center
- Aug 9-13—National VFW Convention—Columbus, OH
- Aug 11—Barrel House Day of Giving for Midwest Honor Flight—(4701 E. 54th Street)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am— Midnight (CT)
- Aug 27-Sep 1—South Dakota State Fair
- Aug 28—Veterans Day at the South Dakota State Fair
- Sep 1—State Offices Closed—Labor Day
- Sep 9-12—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School
- Sep 21-26—VFW National Skill Level and Basic Training Conference—Annapolis, MD

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Oct 13—State Offices Closed—Native American Day
- Oct 18—4th Annual Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—7:00 pm
- Nov 7—MWHF Bingo—Severance Brewing—(701 N. Phillips Avenue)—Sioux Falls—7:00-9:00 pm (CT)
- Nov 10—Barrel House Day of Giving for the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery WAA—(4701 E. 54th Street)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—Midnight (CT)
- Nov 11—State Offices Closed—Veterans Day
- Nov 27—State Offices Closed—Thanksgiving
- Nov 29—Side by Side MWHF Poker Run—Pilot Mikes Roadhouse—(4901 N. Ellis Road)—Sioux Falls— 11:00 am (CT)
- Dec 13—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls— 11:00 am (CT)
- Dec 25—State Offices Closed—Christmas Day



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