



NEWSLETTER

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



NATIONAL GARDEN OF AMERICAN HEROES

Governor Larry Rhoden sent a letter to President Donald J. Trump proposing a location in the Black Hills within sight of Mount Rushmore as a location for the “National Garden of American Heroes.” You can find the letter [here](#).

“Five years ago, in an Independence Day speech at Mount Rushmore in the beautiful Black Hills of South Dakota, you announced a ‘National Garden of American Heroes’ to honor the greatest men and women who helped make America exceptional,” wrote Governor Larry Rhoden. “I would like to offer those same Black Hills as the perfect location for this garden. In fact, we have a plot of land available near-Mount Rushmore that would be ideal for this fantastic effort.”

Chuck Lien and his family own a tract of land close to Mount Rushmore, which they are willing to donate to the project. Former Governor Kristi Noem previously offered the Black Hills as a potential location for the garden back in 2020. You can find materials on the Lien family’s proposal, including Former Governor Noem’s letter, [here](#). Additional resources, including mockups of the proposed Garden of Heroes at this location, are available upon request.

President Trump originally announced the Garden of American Heroes in [his speech](#) at the Mount Rushmore Fireworks Celebration on July 3, 2020. He subsequently signed an [Executive Order](#) in January 2021 establishing the Garden. He signed an [Executive Order](#) “Celebrating America’s 250th Birthday” this past January, which included the revival of the Garden.

“The Black Hills mark the perfect location to achieve your vision for the National Garden of American Heroes,” continued Governor Larry Rhoden. “Together, we will make this project happen in a way that honors America’s heroes, takes advantage of South Dakota’s natural beauty, and incorporates the most iconic monument to our greatest leaders: Mount Rushmore National Memorial.”

George Washington, Laura Ingalls Wilder, Harriet Tubman, Babe Ruth, and other notable Americans from all walks of life will be among those honored in the National Garden of American Heroes.

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RECOGNIZING OUR VIETNAM VETERANS

March 29th marks Vietnam War Veterans Day, a day to reflect on the sacrifices and service of the men and women who served in the Vietnam War. Many of these veterans returned home to a country that was divided in its support for the war, and in some cases, they were met with hostility rather than the gratitude they deserved. This day is an opportunity not only to honor their bravery and commitment but also to offer a long-overdue welcome home.

While we can never fully understand the challenges faced by those who fought during the Vietnam War, we can come together to recognize their contributions, acknowledge their struggles, and ensure they know they are respected, valued, and finally, home. It's a moment to heal old wounds and remind them that their service matters.

Those who fought in Vietnam are part of us, part of our history. They reflected the best in us. No number of wreaths, no amount of music and memorializing will ever do them justice; but it is good for us that we honor them and their sacrifice.

Vietnam Veterans fought for freedom in a place where liberty was in danger. Many sacrificed their lives in the name of duty, honor, and country. All were patriots who lit the world with their fidelity and courage. They kept the faith. They fought on, sustained by one another and deaf to the voices of those who didn't comprehend. They performed with a steadfastness and valor that veterans of other wars salute, and they are forever true patriots. They are our heroes, and we must never forget them.

The South Dakota Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Pierre stands as a testament to those who sacrificed their lives, as well as to the soldiers who returned home. The memorial includes a soldier with his jungle pack slung low, his rifle and K-bar at the ready. Behind him, the wall lists the names of the fallen. This memorial serves as a reminder that these heroes are part of our shared history.

Let us never underestimate what service can mean. It lifts up others. It enriches our lives, and it makes us a part of a proud American story, part of the solemn duty that has moved so many patriots across the generations: to leave this country better than they found it.

To all our veterans: By lending your talents to the United States military, you made us stronger and smarter. By serving with courage and compassion, you set an example for the next generation. And by giving so much, you reminded us that this democracy is worth defending.

That devotion gives life to the ironclad commitments that we make to the American people that we will always protect and defend this country.

Thank you, to all our veterans, for answering your country's call.

GOVERNOR RHODEN PROCLAIMS WELCOME HOME VIETNAM VETERANS DAY

Governor Larry Rhoden, in coordination with the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs, is proclaiming Saturday, March 29, 2025, as “Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day.”

The Governor and the Department are calling on all South Dakotans to recognize the courage, service, and sacrifice of the men and women who served during the Vietnam War. By giving so much, they remind us that democracy is worth defending.

More than 27,000 South Dakotans were called upon to stand up and fight. Of those, 192 South Dakotans made the ultimate sacrifice. Through the establishment of an annual Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day, South Dakotans can express their appreciation and honor the men and women who served during the Vietnam War by thanking them for their selflessness, devotion, and bravery.

“We are honored to recognize and express our deepest gratitude to the courageous men and women who served in the Vietnam War,” said Jeremiah Schneider, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. “Their sacrifice, bravery, and unwavering commitment to our nation often went unacknowledged for far too long. Let us thank them for their service and honor their legacy. Their strength and resilience have paved the way for future generations, and we are forever grateful for their sacrifices in the name of freedom and duty.”



MEDAL OF HONOR DAY

On March 25, the nation comes together to observe Medal of Honor Day, a time to revere the bravery, courage, and sacrifice of the men and women who have received the highest military distinction in the United States: The Medal of Honor. The Medal of Honor, established by President Abraham Lincoln in 1861, is awarded to members of the U.S. Armed Forces who have distinguished themselves through acts of valor above and beyond the call of duty. It is a recognition of extraordinary bravery, selflessness, and commitment to service that can never be overstated.

Each year on March 25, the country pauses to pay tribute to the recipients of this prestigious award, whose actions serve as an enduring reminder of the courage and dedication that keep the spirit of American freedom alive. While their deeds are deeply personal and often go unnoticed by the public, their legacy of valor and sacrifice has a profound impact on the collective history of the nation.



Medal of Honor Display at South Dakota State Capitol.

To date, over 3,500 individuals have received the Medal of Honor. These remarkable men and women come from diverse backgrounds, and their acts of heroism span different conflicts; from the Civil War to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Many of these recipients risked their lives to protect their comrades and civilians, often performing actions that led to their own injury or death in the process. Detailed information about each of these veterans can be found at <https://vetaffairs.sd.gov/resources/medal%20of%20honor.aspx>.

MEDAL OF HONOR DAY (CONTINUED)

A Medal of Honor tribute is on display on the first floor of the west wing of the South Dakota State Capitol and honors these ten veterans with South Dakota ties. Behind each name is the community in which their memorial can be found:

- Captain Willibald C. Bianchi (Brookings);
- General Patrick H. Brady (Hot Springs);
- Colonel George E. "Bud" Day;
- Specialist Four Michael J. Fitzmaurice (Hot Springs);
- Captain Joe J. Foss (Sioux Falls);
- Master Sergeant Woodrow W. Keeble (Sisseton);
- Private First-Class Herbert A. Littleton (Spearfish);
- Captain Arlo L. Olson (Toronto);
- Brigadier General Charles D. Roberts (Fort Meade); and
- Colonel Leo K. Thorsness (Brookings).

"We commemorate Medal of Honor Day not only to honor the recipients themselves but also to remind ourselves of the cost of freedom and the bravery required to defend it," said Jeremiah Schneider, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. "Their acts of valor stand as an example for us all, and we must continue to support and recognize the sacrifices of our military men and women."



Michael and Patty Fitzmaurice by the Display at the State Capitol.

2026 LEGISLATIVE SESSION CALENDAR

South Dakota Legislators adopt a 38-day legislative calendar for 2026. Session will run from January 13—March 12, with veto day scheduled for March 30.

101st SOUTH DAKOTA LEGISLATIVE SESSION CALENDAR 2026 ♦ 38 Legislative Days - 2026 A



Please refer to the Joint Rules, Chapter 17 for complete information.

| | Sun | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Sat |
|---------------|-----|--|---|--|--|--------|-----|
| January 2026 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| | 11 | 12 | 13 Session Opens 12 Noon(CST) State of the State 1:00 p.m. LD 1 | 14 State of the Judiciary 10:00 a.m. State of the Tribes 1:00 p.m. LD 2 | 15 | 16 | 17 |
| | 18 | 19 Martin Luther King Jr. Day | 20 Executive orders filed (Constitution, Art. IV, Sec. 8) LD 5 | 21 | 22 Jt. Memorial Service 3:00pm LD 6 | 23 | 24 |
| | 25 | 26 | 27 Bill and resolution draft requests due to LRC by 5:00pm (for unlimited introduction) LD 9 | 28 | 29 Last day for unlimited bill and resolution introduction (JR 6B-3) (TWO HOURS prior to session) LD 11 | 30 | 31 |
| | 1 | 2 All bill and resolution draft requests due to LRC by 5:00pm LD 13 | 3 Committee bill and resolution draft requests due to LRC by 5:00pm LD 14 | 4 Last day for introduction of individual bills and resolutions (TWO HOURS prior to session) LD 15 | 5 Last day for introduction of committee bills and resolutions (TWO HOURS prior to session) LD 16 | 6 | 7 |
| February 2026 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 Last day for JCA selection of general fund revenue targets (JR 7-11.1) LD 18 | 13 | 14 |
| | 15 | 16 Presidents' Day | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| | 22 | 23 Last day to move required delivery of bills or resolutions by a committee to the house of origin, and Last day to use JR 5-17 LD 26 | 24 Last day to pass bills or joint resolutions by the house of origin (Crossover Day), and Last day to invoke JR 7-7 in the house of origin LD 27 | 25 | 26 Last day for JCA to move required delivery of special appropriation bills to house of origin (JR 17-1) LD 28 | 27 | 28 |
| | 1 | 2 Last day for house of origin to pass special appropriation bills referred from JCA (JR 17-1), and Commemoration requests due to LRC by 5:00pm LD 30 | 3 | 4 JR 5-13 in effect, and Last day for introduction of commemorations (TWO HOURS prior to session) LD 31 | 5 Last day to move required delivery of bills or joint resolutions by a committee to the second house LD 32 | 6 | 7 |
| March 2026 | 8 | 9 Last day for a bill or joint resolution to pass both houses, and Last day to invoke JR 7-7 in the second house LD 34 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
| | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 |
| | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| April 2026 | 29 | 30 Reserved for consideration of gubernatorial vetoes LD 38 | 31 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

BLACK HILLS NATIONAL CEMETERY MILITARY HONORS CEREMONY

The Black Hills National Cemetery will host its quarterly Military Honors Ceremony for Unaccompanied Veterans on Monday, April 7, at 9:00 am (MT). The ceremony will be held at the BHNC Committal Shelter (near the main flag pole) at 20901 Pleasant Valley Drive in Sturgis.

A Military Honors Ceremony for Unaccompanied Veterans is a solemn and respectful event held to pay tribute to veterans who have passed away, without family or loved ones present to attend their funeral services. These ceremonies serve to honor the memory and sacrifices made by service members who, despite their dedication and sacrifice, may have passed without the familial support or recognition that others receive in their final moments.

These ceremonies are not only a symbol of respect but also an important means of ensuring that the service of all veterans is remembered, regardless of their personal circumstances. While many veterans have families and friends who are able to oversee their memorial services, a small but significant number pass without such support. This could be due to various factors such as estrangement, lack of family members, or other personal circumstances.



Unaccompanied veterans, who have no immediate family to mourn their loss, are entitled to receive the same honor and recognition as those with a full family presence. These ceremonies ensure that the veteran's service is not forgotten, and that the ultimate sacrifice they made in serving their country is acknowledged.



REGISTER NOW

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midwesthonorflight.org/golf

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Our Mission: to transport America's Veterans to Washington, D.C. to visit those memorials dedicated to honor the service and sacrifices of themselves and to fellow Veterans.



THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH DAKOTA
KNUDSON SCHOOL OF LAW



FREE LEGAL DROP-IN CLINIC

A charity event to help raise
funds for our veterans in
need of support.



LEGAL PROFESSIONALS, ALONG WITH
LAW STUDENTS WILL BE AVAILABLE TO
ADDRESS AND SUPPORT THE MILITARY
COMMUNITY (AND THEIR FAMILIES)
WITH INITIAL LEGAL QUESTIONS AND
NEEDS



FRIDAY

SATURDAY

MARCH 28

MARCH 29

9AM-4PM

9AM-4PM

THE MILITARY HERITAGE ALLIANCE

VFW POST 2750

1600 W. Russell St
SIOUX FALLS, SD

215 N. MAIN ST
MITCHELL, SD



If you would like to reserve a time slot:

CALL: 605-658-3547

EMAIL: VLEG@USD.EDU OR

TRAVIS.HINDT@USD.EDU



EVENT CONTACT: TRAVIS HINDT|605-658-3547|TRAVIS.HINDT@USD.EDU

4th Annual **STAND UP FOR WOMEN VETERANS RETREAT**

CELEBRATING WOMEN IN THE MILITARY



CONNECTION, EMPOWERMENT, AND COMMUNITY.

GRAB YOUR FAVORITE BATTLE BUDDY AND
EMBARK ON THIS UNFORGETTABLE ADVENTURE
TOGETHER!



GUEST REGISTRATION



SCAN ME TO REGISTER FOR THE EVENT!

\$10 A TICKET

29 MARCH 2025 | 8:30 AM - 2:00 PM

LOCATION: OUR SAVIOR'S LUTHERAN CHURCH ELCA, WEST 33RD STREET,
SIOUX FALLS, SD

Thank You to Our Sponsors!

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Mary Chilton Chapter, NSDAR and the
Mary Chilton DAR Foundation, Sioux Falls, SD

BRONZE SPONSORS





\$10,000 IN PRIZES

PRIZE MONEY BASED ON 40 TEAMS—ACTUAL PAYOFF BASED ON NUMBER OF TEAMS ENTERED.

MAY 16-17, 2025

LAKE THOMPSON, SOUTH DAKOTA

Tournament Payout

- 1st Prize: \$5,000
- 2nd Prize: \$2,500
- 3rd Prize: \$1,200
- 4th Prize: \$800
- 5th Prize: \$500

Rules and Regulations

ELIGIBILITY:

All participants **MUST** have a valid fishing license to participate in the tournament. The total entry fee is \$300 per team or \$250 per team with a Veteran crew member. Contestants **MUST** check in on Friday, May 16, 2025, starting at 5:30 PM and ending at 7:30pm. LOCATION: Half Pint Steaks & Spirits; 104 3rd St SW, De Smet, SD.

TACKLE AND EQUIPMENT:

Both artificial and live bait are permitted. Each team may use up to four rods.

FISHING AREA:

The designated fishing area is Lake Thompson. Launching site is the North Ramp.

SCORING:

Prizes will be based on pounds and ounces most weighted during the tournament day. Each boat will be permitted to catch eight walleyes. Six walleyes of at least 15 inches will be weighed, with only two over 20 inches.

TEAMS:

Contestants can enter as two, three, or four person teams. Tournament payouts will be awarded to the top five teams. Each team is encouraged to include Veterans as part of their crew.



← **SCAN HERE TO REGISTER**

URL: <https://shorturl.at/E7I90>

**A fundraiser for
Community Action for Veterans**



2025 UPCOMING EVENTS

- Mar 25—Medal of Honor Recognition Day
- Mar 28—USD Law School Veterans Legal Drop in Clinic—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—9:00 am—4:00 pm (CT).
- Mar 28—Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Recognition Day—DAV Headquarters—(1519 W. 51st Street)—Sioux Falls—10:30 am (CT)
- Mar 29—USD Law School Veterans Legal Drop in Clinic—VFW Post 2750—(215 N. Main Street)—Mitchell—9:00 am—4:00 pm (CT).
- 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)
- Mar 29—Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans Day
- Apr 7—BHNC Military Honors Ceremony for Unaccompanied Veterans—BHNC Committal Shelter—(20901 Pleasant Valley Drive)—Sturgis—9:00 am (MT)
- Apr 12—Pizza, Pints, and Puzzles Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—The Social—(301 S. Thompson Avenue)—Sioux Falls—5:30 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 16—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home—(2500 Minnekahta Avenue)—Hot Springs—9:00 am (MT)
- Apr 25-26—State DAV Convention—AmericInn—Aberdeen
- Apr 27-30—VFW Proficiency Training Conference—Annapolis, MD
- May 1—Loyalty Day
- May 6—Mission 24 Midwest Honor Flight Operation Welcome Home—Sioux Falls Arena—(1201 N. West Avenue)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (Doors open at 7:30 pm) (CT)
- May 6—SDDVA Mini Conference—Pennington County Conference Room—(312 Kansas City St)—Rapid City—10:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)
- May 7—SDDVA Mini Conference—Post 8 American Legion—(520 S. Pierre St)—Pierre—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- May 8—Victory in Europe Day
- May 8—SDDVA Mini Conference—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell St—Heritage Room)—Sioux Falls—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- May 9—Military Spouse Appreciation Day
- May 17—Armed Forces Day
- May 20—Mission 25 Midwest Honor Flight Operation Welcome Home—Sioux Falls Arena—(1201 N. West Avenue)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (Doors open at 7:30 pm) (CT)
- May 26—State Offices Closed—Memorial Day
- May 26—SDDVA Memorial Day Program at State Veterans Cemetery—12:00 noon (CT)
- Jun 3—Mission 26 Midwest Honor Flight Operation Welcome Home—Hawthorne Aviation—(5815 Mitchell Street #1207)—Sioux City, IA —9:30 pm (Doors open at 7:30 pm) (CT)
- Jun 7—Rich Schild Memorial Poker Run—The Keg—Tabor—12:00 noon (CT)
- Jun 10—MWHF Day of Sweetness—Chick-Fil-A—(4005 W. 41st Street)—Sioux Falls—6:30 am—10:00 pm (CT)
- Jun 14—8th Annual 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)

UPCOMING EVENTS

- Jul 4—State Offices Closed—Fourth of July
- Jul 14—Black Hills Tee it up for the Troops Tournament—Arrowhead Country Club—Rapid City
- Jul 16—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Mitchell VFW Post—(215 N. Main Street)—Mitchell
- Jul 19—Veterans Information Day—BG Ernie Edwards Readiness Center—(1951 N. HWY 20)—Watertown—
10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- Jul 26—3rd Annual Korean War Veterans Appreciation Day—Brookings Outdoor Adventure Center—(2810 22nd
Avenue S)—Brookings—9:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)
- Aug 4-5—Your Journey Matters 2025 Behavioral Health Conference—Sioux Falls Sheraton Convention Center
- Aug 7—Purple Heart Day
- 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 20—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Virtual
- 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 17—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Yankton VFW Post—(209 S. Cedar Street)—Yankton
- Sep 19—POW/MIA Day
- Sep 21-25—NVS Accredited Representative Skill Training—Annapolis, MD
- Sep 21-26—NVS Basic for New Accredited Representatives—Annapolis, MD
- Oct 13—State Offices Closed—Native American Day
- Oct 15—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—Virtual
- 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 8—Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair—Sturgis Community Center—(1401 Lazelle Street)—Sturgis—
11:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)
- 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 19—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—DAV Headquarters (1519 W. 51st Street)—Sioux Falls
- 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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