



# NEWSLETTER

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



## **GOVERNOR SIGNS SDDVA LEGISLATIVE BILLS INTO LAW**

This week, Governor Kristi Noem signed SDDVA’s two legislative bills into law— House Bills 1007 and 1008.

House Bill 1007 amends the requirement to employ a county veterans' service officer.

“Passage of this legislation gives our department a new tool for our toolbox as we aim to reach and assist as many veterans and their dependents as we can,” said SDDVA Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard. “Smaller counties often encounter difficulties in appointing and retaining county veterans service officers. If counties show they have exhausted all other avenues; they may consider contracting with our department to provide veterans service officer coverage for their county. Our tribal partners may contract with the state in the same way if they are unable to appoint their own tribal veterans service officer.”

House Bill 1008 modifies the eligibility for admission to the state veterans' home and repeals the residency requirement.

“Our vision at the Michael J Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home is to care for America’s heroes,” said Superintendent Chuck Johnson. “HB 1008 allows us to expand our reach and offer services to more veterans. Making the decision to go to a nursing home is tough, but knowing that their loved one will be close by can make it a little easier. Historically, our Home hasn’t seen many times where capacity has prevented admissions from occurring. We are confident that there will always be availability for South Dakota veterans when they decide to make the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home their new home.”

SDDVA will be disseminating more information on both of these items to our partners in the near future.

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# LARGEST-EVER EXPANSION OF VETERAN HEALTH CARE

The VA has announced that all veterans who were exposed to toxins and other hazards while serving in the military – at home or abroad – will be eligible to enroll directly in VA health care beginning March 5, 2024. This means that all veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror, or any other combat zone after 9/11 will be eligible to enroll directly in VA health care without first applying for VA benefits. Additionally, veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty in the United States will also be eligible to enroll.

This expansion of VA health care eliminates the phased-in approach called for by the PACT Act – meaning that millions of veterans are becoming eligible for VA health care up to eight years earlier than written into law. This is a critical step forward because veterans who are enrolled in VA health care are proven to have better health outcomes than non-enrolled veterans, and VA hospitals have dramatically outperformed non-VA hospitals in overall quality ratings and patient satisfaction ratings. Additionally, VA health care is often more affordable than non-VA health care for veterans.

“If you’re a veteran who may have been exposed to toxins or hazards while serving our country, at home or abroad, we want you to come to us for the health care you deserve,” said VA Secretary Denis McDonough. “The VA is proven to be the best, most affordable health care in America for veterans – and once you’re in, you have access for life. So don’t wait, enroll starting March 5.”

“Beginning March 5, we’re making millions of veterans eligible for VA health care years earlier than called for by the PACT Act,” said VA Under Secretary for Health Shereef Elnahal, M.D. “With this expansion, the VA can care for all veterans who served in the Vietnam War, the Gulf War, Iraq, Afghanistan, the Global War on Terror, or any other combat zone after 9/11. We can also care for veterans who never deployed but were exposed to toxins or hazards while training or on active duty here at home – by working with chemicals, pesticides, lead, asbestos, certain paints, nuclear weapons, x-rays, and more. We want to bring all of these veterans to the VA for the care they’ve earned and deserve.”

In addition to expanding access to VA care, this decision makes it quicker and easier for millions of veterans to enroll. Many veterans believe they must apply to receive VA disability compensation benefits to become eligible for VA health care, but this is not correct. With this expansion and other authorities, millions of eligible veterans can enroll directly in VA care – without any need to first apply for VA benefits.

(continued on next page)

## VA HEALTH CARE (CONTINUED)

This expansion of care covers Vietnam Veterans, Gulf War Veterans, Iraq War Veterans, Afghanistan War Veterans, Veterans who deployed in support of contingency operations for the Global War on Terror (Operation Enduring Freedom, Operation Freedom's Sentinel, Operation Iraqi Freedom, Operation New Dawn, Operation Inherent Resolve, and Resolute Support Mission), and [more](#).

This expansion also covers many veterans who never deployed as a part of a conflict but were exposed to toxins or hazards while serving in the U.S. Specifically, under this expansion of care, any veteran who participated in a toxic exposure risk activity (TERA) – at home or abroad – is eligible for VA health care. The VA has determined that veterans who were exposed to one or more of the following hazards or conditions during active duty, active duty for training, or inactive duty training participated in a TERA: air pollutants (burn pits, sand, dust, particulates, oil well fires, sulfur fires); chemicals (pesticides, herbicides, depleted uranium with embedded shrapnel, contaminated water); occupational hazards (asbestos, industrial solvents, lead, paints including chemical agent resistant coating, firefighting foams); radiation



(nuclear weapons handling, maintenance and detonation, radioactive material, calibration and measurement sources, X-rays, radiation from military occupational exposure); warfare agents (nerve agents, chemical and biological weapons); and [more](#). The VA will use all available information to determine if veterans participated in a TERA, including military records and service connection.

The VA is executing a nationwide campaign to ensure that as many veterans as possible enroll. To date, the VA's PACT Act outreach campaign has included more than 2,500 events nationwide, \$13 million in paid advertising, 88,000 earned media clips, more than 400 million emails and letters to veterans, VA's first-ever text messaging campaign, the creation of a one-stop-shop PACT Act website, and more. This is the largest outreach campaign in VA history, which has one goal in mind: ensure that all veterans – and their survivors – get the health care and benefits they deserve under the PACT Act.

For more information about how the PACT Act is helping veterans and their survivors, visit the VA's [PACT Act Dashboard](#).



# ROUNDING IT UP!

Now is a good time to start making your shopping list for spring cleaning, the summer barbeques, graduation parties, Mother's Day brunch, Father's Day cookout, etc. Look at this great opportunity at participating Fareway stores!!!

Rounding it up benefits our veterans flying on Midwest Honor Flights.

# FAREWAY®

MEAT & GROCERY

**From May 6 - 18, "Round Up" your purchase at these stores and Fareway will donate it to Midwest Honor Flight!**



**MIDWEST HONOR FLIGHT**

**IOWA STORES:**

- 014 Sergeant Bluff
- 019 Sioux City
- 022 Sioux City
- 829 Sioux City
- 912 Sioux Center
- 719 Le Mars
- 058 Orange City
- 788 Spencer
- 502 Cherokee
- 021 Sheldon

**MINNESOTA STORE:**

- 228 Luverne
- 099 Worthington

**SOUTH DAKOTA STORES:**

- 178 Harrisburg
- 164 Sioux Falls
- 213 Sioux Falls
- 192 Tea



# RIDING TO KEEP THEM FLYING

The 4th Annual "Riding to Keep Them Flying" Honor Ride will be held on Sunday, June 30, 2024.

Registration begins at 1:00 pm at the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance in Sioux Falls and will close at 2:00 pm. Participants can honor a veteran they know and ride to raise funds for Midwest Honor Flight. Ride includes a slow salute past the Sioux Falls VA Hospital before an escort to the South Dakota Veterans Cemetery. At the cemetery, there will be a short ceremony to honor all veterans, remember those who are no longer with us, and offer any participants the chance to share details about who they are riding in honor of (not required). Participants are encouraged to take along a picture of a veteran they wish to honor during the ceremony to ride along with them.

Fees for the ride are \$30 for each bike and rider (which covers a veteran's lunch and dinner on flight), \$45 for a bike, rider, and a passenger (which covers a veteran's breakfast, lunch, and dinner on flight). Registration fees are 100% deductible. Each participant will receive a MWHF rocker patch for this ride (while supplies last), a raffle ticket, and a meal ticket for after the ride.

The Alliance will be open before and after the event for meals and beverages.

*"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**

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

# STREETER JOINS SDDVA TEAM

Please join us in welcoming Jennifer Streeter to our team at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home. Streeter is a licensed practical nurse. When not at work, Streeter likes to go on nature walks, rock hunting, spending time with her family and dogs, and doing crafts.

Streeter is a recent graduate from Western Dakota Tech and plans to pursue her registered nurse license.



# BHSU MILITARY APPRECIATION NIGHT

Black Hills State University will be hosting a special Military Appreciation Night event on Friday, March 1, for active military and veterans. Service members and veterans are invited to come out to watch the BHSU Men's and Women's Basketball teams take on Colorado State Christian University.

Both games will be held at the Young Center (1625 St. Joe Street) in Spearfish. The women's game starts at 5:00 pm (MT) and the men's game starts at 7:00 pm (MT).

If you're active military or a veteran you get in free at the door, plus you'll also get two free tickets for guests. Go Yellow Jackets!!!!

**FRIDAY, MARCH 1, 2024**

**MILITARY APPRECIATION NIGHT**

All Military/Veterans will receive two extra free tickets at the door

**BHSU Basketball @ The Young Center  
Vs. Colorado State Christian University**



Women's @ 5 PM | Men's @ 7 PM

Persons with disabilities requesting accommodations for these events can contact Nicky Winterstein, Nicky.Winterstein@BHSU.edu, 605.642.6003

# VETERAN TO VETERAN VIRTUAL GROUP SESSIONS

The VA Black Hills Health Care System shares this information, and that on the next page, regarding support group programs they are providing. For more information, please contact Tori Tappe at the VABHHCS 605-720-7488.

★ JOIN OUR  
VETERAN-TO-VETERAN  
GROUP ★

## INTRODUCING: LIFE BEYOND THE UNIFORM: EXPLORING MILITARY CULTURE

★  
DO YOU MISS THE  
SERVICE YOU ONCE  
COUNTED DOWN THE  
DAYS TO LEAVE?

★  
DO YOU FEEL ANXIOUS  
DURING ROUTINE  
DOCTOR'S VISITS, EVEN  
THOUGH YOU HANDLE  
HIGH-STRESS  
SITUATIONS WELL?

★  
ARE YOU STRUGGLING  
TO DEFINE WHAT  
SUCCESS MEANS TO  
YOU NOW?

If any of these hit home, you're not alone.  
Join this 8-WEEK virtual veteran-directed group, facilitated by combat  
veteran Psychology Intern Emily Knitter.

### OBJECTIVES:

- Learn more about how military culture affects your everyday life.
- Discover ways to develop a meaningful life that suits you.
- Build camaraderie with other veterans.

TO SIGN UP OR FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
EMAIL EMILY @  
EMILY.KNITTER@VA.GOV

VIRTUAL SESSIONS  
8-WEEK PROGRAM



WEDNESDAY, MARCH 6TH -  
4:00- 5:30 PM



★ JOIN OUR *FEMALE ONLY*  
VETERAN-TO-VETERAN ★  
GROUP

**FOR FEMALE VETERANS**  
**LIFE BEYOND THE UNIFORM:**  
**EXPLORING MILITARY CULTURE**



**DO YOU MISS THE  
SERVICE YOU ONCE  
COUNTED DOWN THE  
DAYS TO LEAVE?**



**DO YOU FEEL ANXIOUS  
DURING ROUTINE  
DOCTOR'S VISITS, EVEN  
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- Discover ways to develop a meaningful life that suits you.
- Build camaraderie with other veterans.

**TO SIGN UP OR FOR MORE INFORMATION:  
EMAIL EMILY AT  
EMILY.KNITTER@VA.GOV**

**VIRTUAL SESSIONS  
8-WEEK PROGRAM** ★ **TUESDAY, MARCH 5TH  
4:00- 5:30 PM**



# UPCOMING EVENTS

- Mar 1—BHSU Military Appreciation Night—Young Center (1625 St. Joe Street) in Spearfish
- Mar 25—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—Drive to Fly @ Great Shots—(2505 W. Benson Road)—Sioux Falls—2:00—5:00 pm (CT)
- Mar 26—Yankton County What’s Brewing—VFW Post 791—(209 Cedar Street)—Yankton—10:00 am (CT)
- Apr 4—Brule County What’s Brewing—Chamberlain Community Center—(112 N. Main Street)—Chamberlain—1:00 pm (CT)
- Apr 5—Melissa Stockwell Program—South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls
- Apr 12—Day County What’s Brewing—VFW Post—(521 First Street West)—Webster—6:00 pm (CT)
- Apr 16—McPherson County What’s Brewing—Eureka School Multi Purpose Room—(805 10th Street)—Eureka—1:00 pm (CT)
- Apr 17—SD Veterans Council Meeting—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—9:00 am (MT)
- Apr 19—American Legion Post 215 Mogen’s Heroes Dance—El Riad Shrine—(510 S. Phillips)—Sioux Falls—6:00 pm
- Apr 26-27—DAV State Convention—Deadwood Lodge
- May 7—Corson County What’s Brewing—McIntosh Pavilion—(Main and First Avenue)—McIntosh—10:00 am (MT)
- May 7—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 18—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Avenue)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
- May 6-18—Fareway Round Up Campaign at participating stores
- May 21—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 19—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Avenue)—Sioux Falls—9:30 pm (CT)
- May 27—SDDVA Memorial Day Program—SD Veterans Cemetery—12:00 noon (CT)
- Jun 5—Midwest Honor Flight Mission 20—Welcome Home Ceremony—Sioux Falls Convention Center—(1201 N. West Avenue)—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 Street)—Sioux Falls—7:00 am—10:00 pm
- Jun 20—23—American Legion State Conference—Pierre
- Jun 30—Midwest Honor Flight Honor Ride—South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—Sioux Falls—Registration—1:00 pm/Ride Begins at 2:30 pm (CT)
- 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—Aberdeen

(Continued)

# UPCOMING EVENTS

Aug 1—2—South Dakota Suicide Prevention Conference—Sioux Falls Convention Center  
 Aug 21—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Yankton  
 Aug 26—Midwest Honor Flight Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th Street)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—8:00 pm (CT)  
 Aug 29—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair—Northwest Energy Freedom Stage—Huron  
 Aug 29—Sep 2—SD State Fair—Huron  
 Sep 3—5—SDDVA Annual CTVSO Benefit School—SD Military Heritage Alliance—(1600 W. Russell Street)—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 Street)—Sioux Falls  
 Oct 16—SD Veterans Council Meeting—Brookings  
 Nov 9—Fifth Annual Northern Hills Veterans Appreciation Fair We've Got Your Six—Sturgis  
 Nov 18—Wreaths Across America Fundraiser—The Barrel House—(4701 E. 54th Street)—Sioux Falls—11:00 am—8:00 pm (CT)  
 Nov 20—SD Veterans Council Meeting—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 14—Wreaths Across America Wreath Laying Ceremony at South Dakota Veterans Cemetery—Sioux Falls—11:00 am (CT)

## 2025 Events

Jan 8—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)

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer  
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