



SOUTH DAKOTA VETERANS COUNCIL
The American Legion, Disabled American Veterans,
Veterans of Foreign Wars,
Paralyzed Veterans of America,
1054 & 959 Vietnam Veterans of America
Military Order of the Purple Heart



The American Legion Post 8
520 S. Pierre St., Pierre, SD
10 January 2024 - 2:00 PM – 5:00 PM CST

Microsoft Teams meeting – For Council Members Only
 Meeting ID: 281 504 409 876
 Passcode: RXD8u4

Call to Order & Pledge of Allegiance

The meeting of the South Dakota Veterans Council (SDVC) was called to order by at 2:02 p.m. and led in the Pledge of Allegiance by President Connie Johnson.

Prayer & Roll Call

Vice President Anna Arnold led the Council in opening prayer and conducted roll call of the Council showing the following members present and a Quorum was met. A current list of Council Members was provided. Handout Provided dated November 15, 2023.

American Legion (TAL): C.P. Van DeList

Disabled American Veterans (DAV): Christine Speirs, Marty Pennock, and Gene Murphy

Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW): Anna Arnold and Dan Klimisch

Vietnam Veterans of America Chapters 1054 and 959 (VVA): Bob Frink (1054) Phil Braeger (1054) and Terry “Hawk” Mayer (959)

Military Order of the Purple Heart (MOPH): Connie Johnson

North Central Chapter Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA): Terry Paulsen

Officers Online: Courtney Steffen (TAL), Fred Nelson (TAL), and Bill Flippo (MOPH)

Official Officers Excused: Courtney Steffen (TAL), Fred Nelson (TAL), Derek Besler (VFW), Buck Underwood (MOPH), Bill Flippo (MOPH), Mike Olson (PVA), and Lisa Cummings (PVA).

There was a total of 31 present for the meeting (attached sign in roster).

Welcome Distinguished Guests and Visitors

President Connie Johnson

Minutes of Last Meeting

President Johnson called on Secretary-Treasurer Pennock to read the minutes from the November 15th, 2023, SDVC meeting.

On a motion by (VVA 959) Terry Mayer and seconded by (VFW) Anna Arnold to waive the reading of the minutes from the November 15th, 2023, SDVC meeting, and approved them as written as they were mailed to members of the council, posted on the website and provided to members prior to the January 10th, 2024, SDVC meeting. Discussion. Motion carried.

Treasurer's Report

President Johnson called on Secretary-Treasurer Pennock for a Treasurer's Report. Beginning Balance as of November 15th, 2023, was \$10,209.24, with no deposits and \$1,425.63 of expenses leaving a balance, as of January 10th, 2024, of \$8,783.61.

On a motion by (VVA 959) Terry Mayer and seconded by (DAV) Gene Murphy to approve the Treasurer's Report. Discussion. Motion carried.

Shirts were handed out to Aaron Pollard, Phil Braeger, Terry Mayer, Gene Murphy, and Christine Speirs. All owe \$30.00 to the SDVC. Gene Murphy paid for his shirt. A shirt is still to be handed to Courtney Steffen.

Endowment Fund Report

President Johnson provided the endowment fund report. Total Net Assets January 9th, 2024, \$3,177,976,74.

Recognition of Individuals

President Johnson recognized and thanked Jim Wosje, Dab Francis Tim Walsh, for catering the Legislative reception. President Johnson additionally thanked The American Legion and Post 8 for allowing the use of the Post for the meeting and Legislative Reception. President Johnson also thanked everyone for making the trek to the meeting and Recognized Interim Director of the BHVAHCS Spencer Mion for attending the meeting and welcomed him.

Updates from Each Veterans Service Organization- Nov Notes Listed

VFW: Anna Arnold reported

- Legislative Session January 20-21 American Inn
- VFW will be at the National Pheasant Festival March 1-3
- Membership is a priority, and it appears that they will meet goal of 102%
- Melissa Stockwell presentation April 5, 2024, Sioux Falls. Handout provided by the DAV

VVA:

959 – Terry Mayer reported

- Armed Forces and Memorial Day Ceremonies being planned
- Election of Officers in April 2024

1054 – Phil Braeger reported

- Funding to Veterans through the Sea of Goodwill - \$35,000.00 in 2023
- Raffle Tickets available for 2024 – Elk Hunt

TAL: C.P. Van DeList reported

- Midwinter February 16-19 Deadwood
 - How to Avoid Scams
 - Capital Lake Improvement
 - “Be the One” Campaign
- Organization’s status is good and on target to meet March goals
- Five-year projections have membership decreasing 2,500
- Membership dues have increased, trying to move away from due based funding

DAV: Christine Speirs reported

- There is an upcoming information fair that will include a concert and a meal that will focus on mental health that will be in concert with the BHVAHCS in the coming months
- DAV National Mid-Winter Conference is in Washington D.C March 7-9. DAV National has set its six critical policy goals for 2024
 - Correct inequities and provide parity in compensation benefits for veterans and survivors

implement the PACT Act and address gaps in toxic exposure benefits

Ensure equity in VA care, services and benefits for women, LGBTQ+ and minority veterans

Provide a full spectrum of long-term care options for service-disabled and aging veterans

Bolster mental health resources to ensure reduction of veteran suicides

Expand the VA’s capacity to deliver timely, high-quality care to veterans

- DAV National has increased its lifetime membership cost to \$325.00. In South Dakota, a new member would pay \$200.00, the DAV Department of South Dakota would pay \$75.00, and the Chapter the member would join would pay \$50.00.
- 2024 State Convention is in Deadwood at the Lodge April 26-27, 2024
- DAV is selling raffle tickets to support the Convention across the state
- The DAV has outfitted to new vehicles for the HTP- Winner and Rapid City
- The DAV hired Bill Branum in October as the HSC for the BHVAHCS

MOPH: Connie Johnson reported

- Brookings was named a MOPH City - Ribbon Cutting Ceremony February 1st
- Working with Courtney Steffen, Brookings County VSO at Ray's Corner
- Organizational Change within North and South Dakota and possible closure of Rapid City Chapter

PVA: Terry Paulsen reported

- Christmas Luncheon on December 14th, 2024, at the PVA office was successful
- Working on May fishing event
- March is set for Government Relations in Washington D.C.
- Membership is down, costs of membership were discussed with associated membership

Guest Speakers

South Dakota Department of Veteran Affairs Overview: Secretary Whitlock

Briefed the Council

Fallen Hero Bridge Dedications – 41 Bridged Named Statewide

What's Brewing Program – Five Upcoming Events

Veterans Not forgotten Program – 18 Facilities Visted Since October

South Dakota Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home Superintendent Chuck Johnson

Priority of gaining staff with working with Western Dakota tech LPN program, working with Hot Springs High school in the CAN program, SD Learn with an apprentice program and working with grants.

Inspection by the VA - November 13-16 – 6 low scope deficiencies,

Budge it is fine. No additional money is needed.

Staffing is main issue with 22 CNAs and six nurses needed. It is his opinion that Location, Housing, and no day care are the main issue revolving around work force shortages at the facility. Currently one wing is closed.

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Legislative Update: Deputy Secretary Pollard

Deputy Pollard reviewed the legislative list that was provided by the SDDVA on January 10, 2024.

SENATE BILLS

SB 29: **Purpose:** allow eligible members of the South Dakota National Guard attending an in-state private, nonprofit post-secondary institution to receive the state tuition benefit.

Sponsors: The Joint Committee on Appropriations at the request of the Department of the Military.

Dec 29 Introduced Version: <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/24961/257770>

Jan 9 First read in Senate and referred to Joint Committee on Appropriations.

SB 30: **Purpose:** prohibit discrimination based on military status.

Sponsors: Senators Duhamel (prime), Hoffman, Johnson, Larson, Mehlhaff, Stalzer, and Zikmund and

Representatives Duffy (prime), Bartels, Blare, Deutsch, Drury, Emery, Koth, Kull, Moore, Perry, Reimer, and Tordsen.

Dec 29 Introduced Version: <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/24578/257771>

Jan 9 First read in Senate and referred to Senate Commerce and Energy.

SB 52: **Purpose:** revise the General Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2024.

Sponsors: The Joint Committee on Appropriations at the request of the Bureau of Finance and Management.

Jan 5 Introduced Version: <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/24978/258461>

Jan 9 First read in Senate and referred to Joint Committee on Appropriations.

HOUSE BILLS

HB 1007: **Purpose:** amend the requirement to employ a county veterans' service officer.

Sponsors: The Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs at the request of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Dec 15 Introduced Version: <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/24864/256786>

Jan 9 First read in House and referred to House Military and Veterans Affairs.

HB 1008: **Purpose:** modify the eligibility for admission to the state veterans' home and repeal the residency requirement.

Sponsors: The Committee on Military and Veterans Affairs at the request of the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Dec 15 Introduced Version: <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/24865/256787>

Jan 9 First read in House and referred to House Military and Veterans Affairs.

NOTE THAT THE COUNCIL DOES NOT SUPPORT THIS BILL AND VOTED AGAINST IT IN OCT 2023.

HB 1013: Purpose: adopt the advanced practice registered nurse compact.

Sponsors: Representative Rehfeldt (prime) and Senator Tobin (prime) at the request of the Committee on Sustainable Models for Long Term Care.

Dec 22 Introduced Version: <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/24509/257350>

Jan 9 First read in House and referred to House Health and Human Services.

HB 1015: Purpose: adopt the social work licensure compact.

Sponsors: Representative Mulder (prime) and Senator Tobin (prime) at the request of the Committee on Sustainable Models for Long Term Care.

Dec 22 Introduced Version: <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/24669/257352>

Jan 9 First read in House and referred to House Health and Human Services.

Jan 11 scheduled for hearing in House Health and Human Services (Room 412) 8:00 am.

HB 1056: Purpose: increase the property tax exemption allowed for certain veterans with a disability.

Sponsors:

Representatives Callies (prime), Bahmuller, Blare, Chaffee, Deutsch, Koth, Kull, Moore, Perry, Rehfeldt, Tordsen, and Wangsness and Senators Crabtree, and Kolbeck (Steve).

Jan 5 Introduced Version: <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/24885/258450>

Jan 9 First read in House and referred to House Taxation.

HB 1067: Purpose: designate Medal of Honor Recognition Day.

Sponsors:

Representatives Tordsen (prime), Bartels, Blare, Chaffee, Deutsch, Duba, Emery, Fitzgerald, Gross, Heermann, Koth, Kull, Moore, Mulally, Nelson, Otten (Ernie), Perry, Pinnow, Reisch, Venhuizen, Wangsness, Weisgram, and Wittman and Senators Hoffman (prime), Crabtree, Johnson, Larson, Mehlhaff, Otten (Herman), Rohl, Stalzer, and Zikmund.

Jan 9 Introduced Version: <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/24471/258767>

HB 1068: Purpose: allow disabled veterans to obtain a standard issue county motor vehicle or motorcycle license plate.

Sponsors: Representatives Weisgram (prime), Bartels, Emery, Moore, Mulally, Perry, Reisch, and Wittman and Senators Zikmund (prime), Pischke, and Reed

Jan 9 Introduced Version: <https://sdlegislature.gov/Session/Bill/24492/258839>

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs State Veterans Cemetery Update: Director Erin Brown

Wreaths Across America - 500 plus folks were in attendance

Memorial Day is being planned for a Noon Event

So far there have been 710 burials

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs Veterans Benefits and Services Update: Program Manager Brett Dickerson

Stated reviewed the Cleland-Dole Act – VSOs please review, a summary link is below
[All WWII Veterans Are Now Eligible For VA Health Care | VA Wilmington Health Care | Veterans Affairs](#)

Nursing home care is free (no copays) for nearly all World War II Veterans who are eligible for nursing home services at VA, including 1) anyone in need of such care for a service-connected [disability](#), (2) anyone in need of such care who also has a service-connected [disability](#) rated at 70 percent or more.

Under this expansion, all WWII Veterans who served between Dec. 7, 1941, and Dec. 31, 1946, are now eligible for VA health care, regardless of their length of service or financial status. These Veterans will not have to pay inpatient or outpatient copays, enrollment fees, or monthly premiums.

However, these Veterans may still have to pay modest copayments for medication or urgent care or long-term care in some cases, depending on their [eligibility and service connection](#).

VA is reaching out by phone and mail to encourage WWII Veterans who are not currently enrolled in VA care to apply today. Veterans who enroll may also keep their private providers, Medicare, and most other insurance to meet their health care needs.

Brett explained that his office has increased in walk ins and claims since the Pact Act. His office supports the claims process and loan programs.

Sioux Falls Veterans Administration Health Care System: Executive Director/CEO Sara Ackert
PACT ACT Updates:

As of 1/8/24, Screened over 22,000 Veterans, 40% claiming at least one exposure.

Health Administration Service Update:

Bene Travel – SFVAHCS received national support to assist in working bene travel claims. Since that ended our numbers are beginning to climb again.

The travel office is down to 1 staff member, 4 of 4 positions have accepted offers with tentative start dates the end of January.

We currently have approximately 4200 claims pending.

As of 1/8/2024 the oldest claim is 10/27/2023

Scanning –We had assistance from numerous staff via Overtime scanning project. That project ended 11/9/2023 and the backlog had essentially been eliminated. The backlog has started creeping up again.

As of 1/8/2024 we had 3498 scanning files pending over 5 days. I am watching this very closely.

We have initiated a System Redesign project team to assess the scanning process

Release of Information – we continue to have a backlog in ROI but it is improving.

Fully staffed.

As of 1/8/2024, there are 787 requests pending over 20 days. Back in August it was over 2100 so they are making progress now that we are 100% staffed and folks are all trained.

Care in the Community Update FY24 Notable Metrics:

Days to schedule appointment: 13.7 days

Call center receives on average 280 calls/day. Total calls Handled: 97.9%

Call center number for questions: 605-333-6800/1-800-316-8387

Sioux Falls is #1 in the VISN for the lowest number of unscheduled consults.

New CITC Director starts January 14th. Her name is Angela VanVeldhuizen. Thank you to Abby Kalt for her leadership.

Construction:

Work is progressing on the 10-bed Hospice Cottage and we anticipate completion in the Spring 2024

New Prosthetics department on the 4th floor – anticipate completion by early next year.

Work continues on the EHRM infrastructure project despite the EHRM implementation rollout being put on pause. Hope to have that project wrapped up by next Spring.

Nurse Recruiting Efforts

CURRENT (1/4/24) Vacancy Rates:

RN – 8.7%

LPN – 23.5%

Nursing Assistant – 48.6%

The estimated Vacancy Rates over the next 2-3 Pay Periods (based on the number of new hires that are scheduled to start) are:

- RN – 5.6%
- LPN – 18.2%
- Nursing Assistant – 39.5%

We are offering recruitment bonuses (amounts vary by Unit and position). RN's in Med/Surg and CLC have a \$15K recruitment bonus and LPNs and NAs in CLC were increased to \$10K.

We are still in the midst of implementing 72/80 for inpatient and CLC nurses and we flexible scheduling is available for the nurse managers.

VA offers multiple scholarship programs and tuition reimbursement programs.

Additional Recruitment / Marketing:

Attendance at Career Fairs (area tech schools and university nursing programs)

Planning an on-site Hiring Fair for February 2024 (with HR) to focus on LPN and NA hiring as well as any other areas that need employees within the VA.

Advertise / marketing VA employment positions on area tech school and university electronic bulletin boards. If a school does not have electronic capability, marketing materials are sent to those schools to share with their students.

Presentations to area schools on employment and residency program options available at the VA. Participation in mock interviews for LPN students.

Continue to 'mine' information on RN, LPN and NA interest on Indeed.com. This information has limited availability since we do not have a paid subscription.

Hiring managers, current staff and recruiter are reaching out to persons they may have previously worked with (or know through personal connections) to share VA employment opportunities.

Recruiter sends out direct emails to VA employed RNs, LPNs and NAs to notify them of current and anticipated future open positions.

Home Health Program –

At this moment Home health team consists of 4 RN's, 2 LPN's, and 2 NA's. All staff have completed orientation and are able to take on additional skilled and non-skilled services.

We continue to grow the team with an additional NA and RN starting soon. The OT and PT positions are working through the hiring process. The program hopes to begin offering therapy services in late Spring to early Summer!

Have 62 total Veterans enrolled with 73 total services as we have 11 Veterans who receive both skilled and non-skilled services from us. As of 1/3/24, we have 2 pending admissions to the program.

Home health provides skilled and non-skilled services.

Skilled services include:

Medication management

Health monitoring

Injections

Wound care

Catheter and/or ostomy changes

Specimen collection

Central line dressing changes

Non-skilled services include:

Assistance with activities of daily living such as:

- Bathing/showering
- Continence cares
- Dressing
- Functional mobility/Exercises
- Feeding if needed
- Toileting

Instrumental Activities of Daily Living

- Cleaning
- Laundry
- Medication compliance
- Using communication devices

Million Veteran Program (MVP)

The VA's Million Veteran Program (MVP) made history: the one-millionth Veteran joined MVP on November 8, 2023.

The Sioux Falls VA is proud to have played its part in this effort, with more than 2,500 Veterans enrolled at our facility.

Since the program's inception in 2011, MVP has become the largest and most diverse genetic research program in the world.

MVP has found genetic markers associated with prostate cancer in male Veterans from varied racial and ethnic backgrounds. These markers are now being tested in a clinical trial to see if they can better predict who is at a higher risk for prostate cancer.

Program information: www.mvp.va.gov or call 866-441-6075.

Under Secretary for Health 6 Priorities:

Support Veterans Whole Health, Their Caregivers and Survivors

Hire faster and more competitively

Connect Veterans to the soonest and best care

Continue to build on increasing in-house access to care by ensuring our providers are as productive as possible and eliminate inefficiencies

Focus on the Veterans Experience using satisfaction data to make improvements.

Serve Veterans with military environmental exposures

Increase outreach efforts to try and increase our enrollment numbers.

Accelerate VA's Journey to a High Reliability Organization

Increase awareness and dedication to being a HRO. Healthcare is a high-risk environment and HRO's experience fewer accidents.

Prevent Veteran suicide

VA's top clinical priority.

Hospital Compare Report

On Monday CMS released their Hospital Compare Preview Report and Sioux Falls VA has maintained their 5-star rating

IHI Designation

Last Friday we received notice from the Institute for Healthcare Improvement that our CLC achieved a designation for being an Age-Friendly Health System. This means that everyone involved in the care of older adults understands what's important to you as an individual. It's not just about treating a condition or a disease. There are 2 levels – level 1 is that we have a plan to implement strategies, and level 2 is that we are committed to Care excellence and have data to support and we are level 2.

Black Hills Veterans Administration Health Care System: Interim Director Spencer Mion

PACT ACT Updates

The PACT Act is a new law that expands VA health care and benefits for Veterans exposed to burn pits, Agent Orange, and other toxic substances.

The PACT Act adds to the list of health conditions that we assume (or "presume") are caused by exposure to these substances. This law helps us provide generations of Veterans—and their survivors—with the care and benefits they've earned and deserve.

We can assist you in getting medical treatment and enhanced benefits by providing Toxic Exposure Screens with your Primary Care Team.

Toxic Exposure Screens (TES)

Clinical reminders for Nurses and Providers are in place for the assessment of Veterans for their exposure to toxins. Toxic Exposure Screens are being offered through your Primary Care Team. TES is also being done in some Specialty Care areas as well and we continue to expand these screens into other areas of the healthcare delivery system.

VABHHCS has screened over 14,000 veterans with 37% endorsing at least 1 exposure concern.

0 Veterans waiting over 30 days for follow-on care.

COMPACT ACT

What it is

Any Veteran – whether enrolled in VA or not – can go to a VA or non-VA emergency room for emergent suicidal care.

We strongly recommend Veterans in suicidal crisis call 911 or visit their nearest emergency room for expedited care.

VA will provide the treatment or cover the costs for treatment including transportation, inpatient or crisis residential care for up to 30 days, and outpatient care for up to 90 days

VA Black Hills has assisted 113 Veterans with coverage under the COMPACT Act since implementation.

New COMPACT ACT Coordinator Jessica Cornwell

Care In the Community

VA provides care to Veterans through community providers when VA cannot provide the care needed. Community care is based on specific eligibility requirements, availability of VA care, and the needs and circumstances of individual Veterans.

Black Hills has 1672 unscheduled consults. (2nd in the VISN)

Recently we have seen an increase of over 1000 consults a month over the last month. We expect our unscheduled to return to around 1000 in the next month.

There are no unscheduled consults >30 days with no activity.

No consults aged > 180 days

Home Based Care

Home Based Primary Care is health care services provided to Veterans in their home. The program is for Veterans who need team based in-home support for ongoing diseases and illnesses that affect their health and daily activities.

Veterans usually have difficulty making and keeping clinic visits because of the severity of their illness and are often homebound, but that is not required.

This program is also for Veterans who are isolated, or their caregiver is experiencing a burden. Home Based Primary Care can be used in combination with other Home and Community-Based Services.

VA medical staff including Physician Assistants, Registered Nurses, Dietitians, Occupational Therapists, Psychologists, and Pharmacists travel to the homes of Veterans in rural communities.

0% readmission rate for all veterans using home-based primary care at VA Black Hills.

Reduced inpatient days by 86.3%.

Reduced ER visits by 36.6%.

Reduced readmissions by 39%.

Currently serving over 160 Veterans in the Community/

Travel Claims

BTSSS Backlog is at ZERO. The oldest claim in review is less than 10 days from the date the claim was submitted.

Construction update – Hot Springs

PACT AREA UPGRADE- Renovate Bldg. 12 for PACT (HS) to increase the size of the PACT Area- A study has been completed identifying a potential space layout.

Construction updates – Fort Meade

Renovate Inpatient 113 will consolidate inpatient care (ICU, Med/Surg, and sleep lab) for staffing efficiency and modernize patient rooms. Anticipated completion in September 2024.

The Upgrade MH Lock Ward project will correct several MHEOC deficiencies including ceiling height, hard ceilings, windows, and handrails. The project has been awarded, with an anticipated start in September 2023 and completion in September 2024.

Dakotas Regional Office: Sioux Falls Assistant Veterans Service Center Manager Megan Carter

PACT Act

Sergeant First Class Heath Robinson Honoring our Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2022 (PACT) has been signed by the President adding 20 toxic exposure related condition to the presumptive list of Veterans and Survivors.

- Empower VA to deliver benefits to Veterans living with more than 20 toxic exposure-related conditions and to their survivors;
- Make generations of Veterans eligible for VA health care, while increasing care for many more;
- Ensure that every enrolled Veteran receives an initial toxic exposure screening at VA and follow-up screening at least every 5 years;
- Increase VA research on toxic exposure; and
- Give VA tools to hire and retain employees and modernize over 30 facilities.

VBA has received over 1,390,882 claims since the passage of the law. Decisions are being made as of January 9, 2024. VBA has already processed over 980,018 PACT related claims.

Cancer claims are being prioritized for processing due to the potential for terminal illness.

Conditions included as presumptive for PACT for toxic airborne exposures:

These types of cancers:

- Brain cancer
- Glioblastoma
- Respiratory (breathing-related) cancer of any type
- Gastrointestinal cancer of any type
- Head cancer of any type
- Lymphoma of any type
- Lymphatic cancer of any type
- Neck cancer

- Pancreatic cancer
- Reproductive cancer of any type
- Kidney cancer
- Melanoma

These illnesses:

- Asthma that was diagnosed after service
- Chronic rhinitis
- Chronic sinusitis
- Constrictive bronchiolitis or obliterative bronchiolitis
- Emphysema
- Granulomatous disease
- Interstitial lung disease (ILD)
- Pleuritis
- Pulmonary fibrosis
- Sarcoidosis
- Chronic bronchitis
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD)

Veterans and survivors are encouraged to submit claims.

[VA Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry - Reports - Public Health](#)

Veterans and survivors are encouraged to submit claims.

PACT Registries: Below is a link to a PACT registries website.

- [VA Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry - Reports - Public Health](#)

SD PACT: Inv. 1599, Comp. 3287, 82.4% Grant Rate, \$15.3 M

US PACT: Inv. 482,864, Comp. 908,018, \$3.69 B

VBA Veteran Readiness and Employment Services

Veterans may receive Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) (Formerly known as Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment) services to help with job training, employment accommodations, resume development, and job seeking skills coaching. Other services may be provided to assist

Veterans and Servicemembers in starting their own businesses or independent living services for those who are severely disabled and unable to work in traditional employment.

Veterans/Servicemembers can visit the Regional Office in Sioux Falls or visit the following website to learn more and apply for VR&E benefits: <https://www.va.gov/careers-employment/vocational-rehabilitation/>.

Current Regional Office Public Contact/Veterans Readiness and Employment Hours

Regional Office is opened from 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding Federal Holidays. Masks are not required when entering the Regional Office at this time. If there is anyone that is interested in the Vocational Rehabilitation program,

MST coordinators are at the station, male and female, for any questions that arise.

U.S. Congressional Representative Liaisons for Senator John Thune, Senator Michael Rounds, and Representative Dusty Johnson

Ben Ready – Senator Thune. Chaos is expected with the federal funding approval process taking priority. Supplemental spending is anticipated with border security being a priority with foreign wars looming. As an election year is in place not much legislation is anticipated to go forward.

GP Carmichael – Senator Rounds. Reviewed that with the NDAA was recently signed and the NAIIV was approved. Their office recently held academy review boards, 19 applicants. A review of funding for Elsworth AFB and the money that has been allocated to support the base and the B21s. It included 11.5B in defense programs outside pentagon, a pay increase for service members, 11.25M for Sioux Falls National Guard Readiness Center, and 2.9B for B-21 development and more for procurement. Senator Rounds has been identified as Outstanding DAV Legislator of the Year.

Katie Murray – Representative Johnson. Her office has working on a lot of cases and acknowledge that the past year has been the least productive year legislatively due to the speaker not being identified Representative Johnson supportive over 1,000 Vietnam Veterans in the past four years.

Unfinished Business

- Legislative Reception January 10th, 2024, The American Legion Post 8, Pierre, 5:30pm – 7:30pm (CST)
- SDVC Federal Tax-Exempt Status – Treasurer Marty Pennock reported that Form 1024 was filed on behalf of the South Dakota Veterans Council after the motion from the August 11th, 2023 SDVC meeting motion to approve the council to seek a tax-exempt status. The SDVC new EIN is 37-2103133 and the SD Business ID is NS256444. The SDVC filed under 501C-19 is waiting for the IRS to provide a decision. These decisions can take up to six months.

Application for Recognition for Exemption Under Section 501(a) or Section 521

Form Number: 1024

Form Status: Accepted

Pay.gov Tracking ID: 2775E2KG

Date Submitted: 08/24/2023 14:30:19 PM

Application Name: Form 1024, Application for Recognition of Exemption Under Section 501(a)

Called the IRS on January 4th, 2024 and they are still waiting for it to be actioned. The agent stated that it is taking the full 180 days for these to be acted on and anticipates this to be on or about February 20th, 2024.

- SDVC Website Discussion – No discussion
- Virtual Meetings – President Connie Johnson stated that we will continue to provide the virtual option for members and will now allow for the virtual option to be disseminated for others to participate. The American Legion has volunteered to provide the equipment at all meetings.
- Legislation - President Connie Johnson again reviewed the listing of legislation that is relevant to the group and encouraged all to remain for the legislative reception that followed the SDVC meeting. A legislative calendar was provided. In addition a listing of State Legislators was provided and additional legislation was discussed on HB 1016.

C.P. Van Delist asserted that the Council does not have the ability to lobby under the construct of its current bylaws and that we are all represent separate organizations. He asserted that he cannot represent another organization nor someone else speak on behalf of the American Legion. In addition, the SDVC is not a registered lobbying organization, nor should it ever be such. The SDVC can only represent its own members, all 18 of them and cannot speak on behalf of the 65,000 Veterans in SD because they are not selected by the Veterans.

New Business

- 2024 Meeting Dates
 - April 17 – Rapid City

On a motion by (PVA) Terry Paulsen and seconded by (VFW) Anna Arnold to hold the next South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting at VFW Post 1273, in Rapid City, from 9am (MT) to 12pm(MT). Discussion. Motion carried.

- July 17 – Aberdeen
- August 21 – Yankton
- September 18 - Rapid City
- October 16 - Brookings
- November 20 – Sioux Falls
- Legislative Roundtables November 20 (Sioux Falls), 21 (Watertown), 22 (Rapid City), 23(Pierre)
- January 8, 2025 – Pierre with the Legislative Reception

Good of the Order and Closing Comments

Gene Murphy stated that a copy of two recent articles in the Argus Leader were handed out – Polls Shows Grocery Tax Opposition Remains High – Brat Pfankuch and SDBOR Lays Legislative Priorities Budget for 24 – Morgan Matzen. The question remains that the SDVC has yet to have its priorities heard by the Governor. In these articles these groups have had their voices heard and their priorities are getting to the Governor. What is the next step for the Council to gain a meeting with the Governor with the need of its priorities? Should media be contacted? President Johnson has requested two meetings with the Governor and has yet to be responded to.

Another article was provide on Nursing Homes that was in the Argus Leader – Nursing Home Complaints Up 38% Since 2022.

Closing Prayer

Vice President Arnold provided a closing prayer

Honors to the American Flag and Adjournment

President Johnson rendered honors to the flag.

On a motion by (DAV) Gene Murphy and seconded by (VFW) Anna Arnold to adjourn the meeting. The motion carried. The meeting adjourned at 4:59 p.m.