



Thanking Our Veterans

By Senator Mike Rounds

Each year on Nov. 11, we recognize the service made by our country's veterans. The date is meaningful, as November 11, 1918 is the day World War I finally came to an end and November 11 became a holiday called Armistice Day. In 1954, the 11th day of November became a legal holiday, reminding Americans to honor all veterans. This year, we commemorate the day by thanking the generations of South Dakotans who have answered the call to serve.

South Dakota has one of the highest rates of military membership per capita in the nation, and we are home to more than 72,000 veterans. It is a privilege for me to serve on two Senate committees tasked with improving service for current military members and veterans: the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee.

I have introduced and cosponsored a number of bills specifically designed to help veterans. The Veterans First Act, which I cosponsored, takes meaningful steps to hold the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) accountable and, in turn, improve care for our nation's veterans. This bill truly puts the

needs of our veterans first by addressing the lack of accountability at the VA.

The Veterans First Act includes a number of provisions I offered to improve care for our veterans, including the Veterans Choice Equal Cost for Care Act, which amends the Choice Act by eliminating the "secondary payer clause" to make certain veterans do not pay more for private care under the Choice Act than they would if they were seen at a VA facility. It also includes my Veterans Health Administration Spending and Transparency Oversight Act. This legislation requires the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) to produce an annual report to Congress detailing the cost of the health care it provides. Having accurate cost accounting by the VHA will help Congress identify legislative options aimed at better health care for our nation's veterans. I'm hopeful that Congress will pass the Veterans First Act before the end of the year.

We have four offices throughout South Dakota staffed with specially-trained individuals who can help veterans navigate the often confusing bureaucracy at the VA. We understand that it can be frustrating to have an issue with the VA and not know the best way to resolve

it. That's why we are here to help in any way we can. My website, www.rounds.senate.gov, has a list of our office locations and phone numbers. Please let us know if we can help you with any problems you're having with the VA.

Making sure our veterans get the best possible care in the timeliest manner is one of my top priorities working as your senator. Earlier this year, I held a tele-town hall with South Dakota veterans and their families, representatives from the VA and the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee. It was a great opportunity for veterans to get their questions answered by experts in the field. We hope to continue doing these tele-town halls in the future.

Our nation's veterans committed to selflessly defend our freedoms. Now they deserve a commitment from the country for which they so bravely fought. This Veterans Day, we say 'thank you' to our veterans and their families, we remember those who paid the ultimate sacrifice, and we continue doing what we can to improve the lives of the men and women who donned the uniform of the United States of America.

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