

SOUTH DAKOTA VETERANS CAMPAIGN FOR EMPLOYMENT



The South Dakota Legislature listened to a wish list created by United States military veterans last week, one that is more focused on creative thinking rather than big-ticket funding. The Disabled American Veterans of South Dakota sponsored a roundtable discussion that featured veterans, 12 state legislators, and Senator John Thune's aide Ben Ready. DAV representatives were also in attendance. The veterans in attendance were from the organizations of Veterans of Foreign Wars and Paralyzed American Veterans. The veterans in attendance also listened to state senator Mark Johnston's proposal that would make South Dakota a member of the Department of Defense Employer Partnership Organization. Members of the program pledge to hire veterans and family members of active duty military members. "Let's force the issue with the state and get them to put their money where their mouth is," Johnston, R-District 12, said. Sen. Shantel Krebs, R-District 10, said, "I absolutely support that." Johnston also announced that he was extending the idea to include any disabled military veterans who might be interested in part-time work since they cannot work full-time in most cases. Rick Barg, the Adjutant for the VFW, asked the state to formally clarify its preference with veterans being hired by companies and how they intend to enforce their laws. Barg claims that the current policies are so vague that they are pretty much useless when it comes to enforcing them. The Adjutant for the DAV, Gene Murphy, said that there needs to be some creative thinking done when it comes to creating veterans' nursing homes. A new veterans' home is under construction in eastern South Dakota, but it has become a financial problem for the state. Murphy has suggested that the state create a partnership with nursing homes in rural South Dakota in an effort to reserve rooms or wings that would house veterans within those facilities. This proposal would permit veterans to find nursing home care close to their residence. "I am really a proponent of public-private partnerships," Johnston said. Johnston also went on to explain that many of the rural homes in the state have extra beds, requiring only an administrative rule change from the state, not new legislation to create a partnership for veteran care. In eastern South Dakota, Murphy would like to construct a veterans' cemetery, which he has called for studies involving the state and federal government. Murphy told those in attendance that the closest cemeteries are located in the Twin Cities and in the Black Hills. This causes many veterans' families to drive almost five hours to visit gravesites and pay their respects. The agenda for the veterans group also asked for a salary increase for county and tribal veterans' service officers. Last year the proposal failed once it hit the legislative session. Representative Frank Kloucek said that it could cost close to \$200,000.

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