

**REVENUE: No revenue impact**

**FISCAL: Fiscal statement issued**

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<b>Action:</b>	Do Pass as Amended, Be Printed Engrossed, and Be Referred to the Committee on Ways and Means by prior reference
<b>Vote:</b>	7 - 0 - 1
<b>Yeas:</b>	Boone, Esquivel, Freeman, Matthews, Riley, Weidner, Cowan
<b>Nays:</b>	0
<b>Exc.:</b>	Komp
<b>Prepared By:</b>	David Molina, Administrator
<b>Meeting Dates:</b>	2/3, 3/10, 3/17

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**WHAT THE MEASURE DOES:** Creates Campus Veterans' Service Officer (VSO) Program in the Department of Veterans' Affairs (ODVA) and assigns federally accredited VSOs to each Oregon University System institution and community college to provide benefits outreach to Oregon National Guard/United States Army Reserve student-veterans. Directs university-colleges to provide office space for related veterans' services. Declares an emergency, effective on passage.

**ISSUES DISCUSSED:**

- The need for sufficient VSO staffing levels
- Compromise on four VSOs and their responsibilities to cover assigned areas
- Conflict between State and County VSOs related to jurisdiction
- The need for on-campus subject matter experts in federal veterans law to support student-veterans
- Coordination between VSOs and on-campus staff relating to responsibilities, authority, and scope of work
- The need to address student-veterans with housing, financial assistance, employment and healthcare
- Widespread support among student-veterans, veteran advocacy organizations, and university-colleges

**EFFECT OF COMMITTEE AMENDMENT:** Provides ODVA sufficient appointment of VSOs to universities and colleges to provide veterans' services. Directs university-colleges to provide office space for related veterans' services. Adds an emergency clause, effective on passage.

**BACKGROUND:** Federally accredited VSOs perform several functions:

- Advocates ensuring veterans receive the maximum amount of benefits earned as a result of their military service
- Medical, legal and military research to develop evidence to prove veteran's eligibility for VA benefits
- Subject matter experts in the exacting and complex United States Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) laws, regulations, and rules
- Protectors of veterans' rights, of taxpayers against fraud, managers of the VA bureaucracy for veterans

In 2007, the federal VA paid \$1.12 billion to Oregon in the form of disability compensation, pension, health care benefits, and education benefits claims. During the 2007 Interim, Portland State University VSO pilot-program resulted in 113 interviews, 110 claims completed, and direct-contact with over 300 student-veterans.

Beginning August 1, 2009, the New GI Bill (Post 9/11 GI Bill) will provide: full tuition and fees, monthly housing stipend, and \$1,000 yearly stipend for books and supplies. Guard and Reserve members must serve 36 months to receive the full benefit. Unlike the previous Montgomery GI Bill, service members are pro-rated for 90 days, 180 days, or 24 months of service. As of June 30, 2008, Oregon had 21,731 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans, and on average between three to five hundred citizen-soldiers return from overseas assignments on a monthly basis.

The Governor's Task Force on Veterans' Services Report (December 2008) top recommendation is to place VSOs at Oregon's university-college campuses to enable veterans to obtain coordinated benefits and claims support. House Bill 2178 A is a revision to House Bill 3294 A (2007) which was not enacted.

3/24/2009 11:09 AM

***This summary has not been adopted or officially endorsed by action of the committee.***