

REVENUE: No revenue impact

FISCAL: No fiscal impact

Action:	Be Adopted
Vote:	8 - 0 - 0
Yeas:	Boone, Esquivel, Freeman, Komp, Matthews, Riley, Weidner, Cowan
Nays:	0
Exc.:	0
Prepared By:	David Molina, Administrator
Meeting Dates:	3/26, 4/14, 4/30, 5/5

WHAT THE MEASURE DOES: Urges Congress to create and fund a statewide veterans transportation system that will transport veterans, particularly disabled veterans, to and from Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facilities.

ISSUES DISCUSSED:

- No reliable statewide transportation system for wheelchair-bound passengers
- Demand currently outstrips supply for a consistent and dependable transportation system to VA medical facilities, especially for veterans in rural and remote parts of the state
- Related measure, Senate Bill 98
- Widespread support among veterans and their dependants, and veterans advocacy organizations
- Congressman DeFazio recognizes the problem, and has prioritized legislation to address this issue

EFFECT OF COMMITTEE AMENDMENT: No amendment.

BACKGROUND: Currently, many Oregon veterans who live in rural and remote areas must travel to one of two Veterans Affairs (VA) medical facility locations, Portland or Roseburg, for their specialty care. The state has ten community-based outreach clinics that provide primary care, but lacks specialty care for issues such as arthritis, optometry, hearing, orthopedic surgery, and heart surgery. Oregon's geographic terrain requires veterans who live in rural and remote areas of the state to travel long distance to receive their health care, often through harsh weather conditions. The Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs asserts that only 80,000 veterans, out of a total of 350,000 veterans statewide, are enrolled with the VA health care system. The remaining 270,000 veterans who live in rural and remote areas of the state are either medically uncovered or have selected a private insurer. Proponents of Senate Joint Memorial 2 assert that this discrepancy foregoes more than \$4 billion in potential reimbursement benefits unclaimed to the state.

The federal VA has a partnership with the Disabled American Veterans (DAV), a 1.2 million-member organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of America's disabled veterans and their families. The DAV's voluntary services program operates a comprehensive national network of volunteers who provide veterans free rides to and from VA medical facilities. In Oregon, however, none of the 23 vans are equipped for wheelchair-bound passengers. Additionally, federal VA policy prohibits these volunteers from transporting wheelchair-bound veterans due to insurance concerns.

The *National Conference of State Legislatures Report on Coordinated Human Service Transportation* (January 2005) indicates that Oregon has no comprehensive coordination statute specific to specialized services with the exception for transportation services for senior citizens and people of disabilities. The Department of Human Services asserts the states Medicaid clients, both in urban and rural areas, take advantage of a statewide transportation system cost-free.

Senate Joint Memorial 2 is a companion measure to Senate Bill 98, which creates a Task Force on Veterans Transportation to study methods to create transportation for veterans to access health care.

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