

Expanding the Veterans No Wrong Door Policy **HB 2421 and 2422**

From the Office of Representative Matthews

Oregon currently has 330,000 veterans, of which only about 100,000 are receiving benefits. These veterans receive approximately \$1.9 billion in benefits annually. The Oregon Department of Veterans Affairs (ODVA) estimates that of the 230,000 veterans not receiving benefits at least 100,000 of them could qualify for federal benefits and that a major hurdle is identifying and contacting veterans that qualify for assistance.

In 2012 the Oregon Legislature passed HB 4064 into law. This law directs the Bureau of Labor and Industries (BOLI) that whenever a member of the public requests assistance from them they inquire whether or not they are a veteran and if they are can BOLI forward their contact information to the ODVA. The ODVA then sees if that veteran qualifies for any benefits and contacts them if they do and assists them in applying for those benefits.

This program (dubbed The No Wrong Door Policy) has led to about 70 veterans being forwarded to ODVA. House Bills 2421 and 2422 look to expand this program to include the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV), and the Department Human Services (DHS), respectively. If an additional 100,000 veterans start receiving benefits the ODVA estimates that an additional \$1.5-\$2 billion could be awarded annually. DHS and DMV both have a far greater level of contact with individuals than BOLI and expanding this program to these departments could lead to a major increase in veterans receiving benefits.

We have been working with DHS, DMV, and ODVA to make sure that each of these bills will work with the existing infrastructure and we have been working to make sure the implementation of these programs will be as effortless and cost efficient as possible. DHS estimates that it will have a negligible fiscal impact and the DMV says it will cost about \$100,000 to begin the program and only \$32,500 every biennium to keep the program active, while the ODVA does not believe this will impact them fiscally.

The state of Oregon has a great opportunity to identify and assist more of our veterans for a minimal cost. In addition to helping our veterans receive more federal dollars an increase in veterans receiving benefits will encourage a greater federal investment in our veteran support infrastructure including veterans' service centers and more health care resources for our veterans.